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NRC to Evaluate Radiation Release at National Institute of Standards and Technology

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will conduct a special inspection to evaluate the cause of a radiation release and limited worker contamination at the National Institute of Standards and Technology's research reactor in Gaithersburg, Md.

NIST notified the NRC the morning of Feb. 3 of an emergency during startup of the reactor, where radioactive material was released inside the reactor building. Six workers were initially contaminated during the event, and four additional workers were mildly contaminated while responding later in the day. All the workers were decontaminated and cleared to return home the same day. While a small amount of radioactive material reached the environment, available information continues to show the public near the NIST facility remains safe, as the release was under regulatory limits.

Two inspectors from NRC headquarters in Rockville, Md., will begin this inspection Feb. 9, supplemented with additional inspectors as needed. They will evaluate the adequacy of NIST's response to the situation, NIST's determination of the root cause of the event and NIST's corrective actions. The inspectors will also review radiation monitoring data and determine if there are generic implications for similar facilities. The inspectors will follow all applicable guidelines related to the COVID-19 public health emergency during their activities.

The inspectors will prepare a written report that will be issued approximately 30 days following completion of the inspection. The report will be publicly available through the NRC's electronic document database, [ADAMS](#). Help in using ADAMS is available through the NRC Public Document Room by calling 1-800-397-4209.