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NRC BARS CONNECTICUT NUCLEAR MEDICINE TECHNOLOGIST FROM LICENSED ACTIVITIES FOR ONE YEAR

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has banned Lee LaRocque, a former hospital chief nuclear medicine technologist, from NRC-licensed activities for one year. The action follows an investigation which found that he deliberately violated NRC requirements while working at Windham Community Memorial Hospital in Willimantic, Conn.

The Windham facility holds an NRC license to use radioactive materials for medical use. Mr. LaRocque was its chief nuclear medicine technologist from September 1991 through August 1997, when he was demoted to nuclear medicine technologist. He worked in that position until he was dismissed last May.

The NRC found that, on May 11 of last year, Mr. LaRocque deliberately altered the dose calibrator reading for an iodine-131 capsule, thereby misleading the authorized user/attending physician regarding the assayed dose. NRC further found that he administered the capsule to a patient, knowing that the dose exceeded the license limits, and deliberately created inaccurate records of the assayed and administered dose.

Previously, in 1997, Mr. LaRocque created inaccurate records associated with the disposal of NRC-licensed material; and failed to report promptly that dose calibrator constancy records had been falsified by another nuclear medicine technician. In that case, NRC issued a Notice of Violation, but did not fine the hospital. The NRC staff also sent a letter to Mr. LaRocque explaining that any future deliberate misconduct could subject him to a significant enforcement action.

In the order banning Mr. LaRocque's employment, Malcolm R. Knapp, NRC Deputy Executive Director for Regulatory Effectiveness, said Mr. LaRocque's actions have "raised serious doubts as to whether he can be relied upon to comply with NRC requirements and to provide complete and accurate information to the NRC and its licensee."

NRC did not cite the hospital for any violations concerning the May 1998 incident. That decision was made because: (1) Windham took prompt and comprehensive action following the February 1998 enforcement action, including demoting Mr. LaRocque; (2) that the later violations resulted from the deliberate misconduct of that same technologist acting alone; and (3) Windham identified the violations, promptly reported them to the NRC and took comprehensive corrective action, including terminating Mr. LaRocque's employment.

Mr. LaRocque may request a hearing on the action within 20 days.

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