

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs -- Region II
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**NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$8,800 IN FINES
AGAINST VIRGINIA WELL LOGGING COMPANY**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed \$8,800 in civil penalties against Marshall Miller & Associates of Bluefield, Virginia, for multiple violations of NRC and license requirements related to a cesium-137 radioactive source used in well logging.

Well logging is a technique used in oil and gas exploration to help predict the commercial viability of new or existing wells. It involves lowering a well-logging tool, including a sealed source of radioactive material, into a well on a wire. This device sends data on the well's underground characteristics to the surface, where it is plotted on a chart.

The NRC has notified the company that the violations, found during inspections and investigations in 1997 and 1998, include failures to: adequately train employees, oversee licensed activities, and maintain complete and accurate records of training and radiological surveys.

These violations contributed, in part, to the company's failure to determine promptly, in August 1997, that a cesium-137 radioactive source contained in a well logging gauge had become detached from its housing. As a result, some company employees received unplanned radiation exposures, although NRC occupational exposure limits were not exceeded.

Because the NRC concluded that some of the violations were willful, it has characterized this case as two separate "Severity Level II" problems, the second most serious of the four severity levels in the NRC Enforcement Policy. In his letter informing the company of the civil penalties, NRC Regional Administrator Luis Reyes noted that Marshall Miller & Associates took prompt and comprehensive corrective actions, but he pointed out that the violations were generally identified by the NRC, rather than by the company.

The company has 30 days from receipt of the Notice of Violation to either pay the fine or protest its imposition.

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