



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION I

475 Allendale Road
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No. I-01-004

February 2, 2001

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NRC TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS WITH PHILADELPHIA MEDICAL FACILITY

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of a Philadelphia medical facility on Monday, Feb. 5, to discuss apparent violations of agency requirements involving the use of NRC-licensed radioactive material used for cancer treatments.

Fox Chase Medical Center officials will take part in the predecisional enforcement conference at 10 a.m. at the NRC Region I office, 475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. The meeting will be held in the Public Meeting Room and be open to the public.

On March 31, 2000, and April 5 and 19, 2000, the NRC conducted a safety inspection at Fox Chase, located at 7701 Burholme Ave. The inspection focused exclusively on a new High Dose Rate Afterloading (HDR) facility, which was completed last March and then put into service. (High Dose Rate Afterloaders utilize radioactive sources -- in this case iridium-192 -- that are placed near tumors to kill cancer cells.)

Based on the inspection, the NRC has concluded the shielding installed for the HDR facility was inadequate and that radiation dose levels were higher than would be expected for a facility designed for the purpose of routine use of such equipment. The inadequacy of the shielding was due to a failure by contractors to install all the necessary shielding. It was also determined that the failure of Fox Chase to determine some shielding was missing prior to initial operation of the unit caused acceptable radiation doses to be exceeded in unrestricted areas adjacent to the HDR facility. Although acceptable radiation dose levels were exceeded, the amount of radiation a staff member or member of the public could have been exposed to would have been very low, well below the public dose limit.

The NRC has identified two apparent violations that are being considered for escalated enforcement. They are: (1) a failure to perform an adequate survey of the potential radiological hazards before exposing a radioactive source and using the High Dose Rate Afterloading facility; and (2) exceeding radiation dose limits for unrestricted areas.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that the NRC has determined a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to

discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide the licensee with an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the licensee to outline its proposed corrective action.

No decision on the apparent violations will be made at this conference. That decision will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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