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NRC PROPOSES \$7,500 FINE AGAINST NEW JERSEY FIRM FOR FAILING TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF NUCLEAR GAUGE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$7,500 civil penalty against a Wayne, N.J., company for a failure to maintain control over a gauge that uses a radioactive source to measure the thickness of material. The device emits radiation, which both penetrates and is reflected by the material to be measured. Detectors then assess the amount of radiation that passes through or is reflected to determine the thickness.

On January 3, a representative of the Onyx Greentree Landfill in Kersey, Pa., informed the NRC that a radioactive source, containing 150 millicuries of americium-241, had been found in a shipment of waste from Totowa, N.J. Based on information provided by a consultant to the landfill, the NRC traced the radioactive material to a nuclear gauge that the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics Corporation, based in Wayne, N.J., had obtained in the past. On January 14, the NRC conducted an inspection at the company's facility. Subsequently, the company sent the agency a letter on February 5 in which it described the events that led to the loss of the device and corrective actions it had taken to prevent a recurrence. Saint-Gobain reported that the gauge had been mistakenly discarded in the normal trash after being disassembled.

Based on the information developed during the inspection as well as the company's response, the NRC has proposed a \$7,500 fine against the firm for failing to maintain control of the gauge. "Although the gauge's source was in the shielded condition at the time it was discovered at the landfill, this violation is of concern to the NRC because (1) the failure to control the gauge resulted in the loss of radioactive material in the public domain; and (2) such sources can result in substantial unintended radiation dose to an individual if the source is removed from the shielded position," NRC Region I Administration Hubert J. Miller wrote in a letter to the company regarding the enforcement action.

Saint-Gobain has informed the NRC that it has implemented several corrective actions in response to the event. These include recovery of the source from the landfill; shipping the source back to the manufacturer for proper disposal; inventorying all radioactive sources located

at its facility; and providing training for all employees involved with work in the areas of the radioactive devices.

The company has 30 days from receipt of the letter to either pay the civil penalty or protest its imposition.

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