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NRC TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATION WITH MOUNT LAUREL, N.J., COMPANY

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of a Mount Laurel, N.J., engineering firm on Wednesday, Dec. 20, to discuss an apparent violation of agency requirements involving the control of portable nuclear gauges. The apparent violation, which stems from the loss of a gauge, was identified during an NRC special inspection performed in September.

The predecisional enforcement conference with SITE-Blauvelt Engineering, Inc., is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. in the Public Meeting Room at the NRC Region I Office, at 475 Allendale Road in King of Prussia, Pa., and will be open to the public. If necessary, portions of the meeting may be closed to the public to discuss sensitive security aspects of the apparent violation. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions of NRC staff prior to the meeting's adjournment.

The NRC conducted a special inspection on Sept. 6 at the company's Mount Laurel office and at a storage location used by the company in Stroudsburg (Monroe County), Pa. The apparent violation identified as a result of that review involves a failure to use a minimum of two independent physical controls to prevent unauthorized removal of a licensed nuclear gauge when the device is not under the direct control and constant surveillance of a company employee(s).

Despite the requirement, a portable nuclear gauge was stored by SITE-Blauvelt at a temporary job site in Stroudsburg on Aug. 30 with only one tangible barrier securing it from unauthorized removal. Specifically, the only barrier preventing the gauge's unauthorized removal was a locked toolshed door. The gauge was stolen and has not been recovered. The company has offered a reward for information leading to the return of the device.

Such gauges contain small amounts of radioactive material and are used for such industrial purposes as measuring the density of soil at construction sites. As long as the radioactive material remains properly shielded inside its container, it would not pose a hazard to members of the public coming in contact with a gauge. If the radioactive material was removed from the gauge, an individual who remained in close proximity to it for an extended period of time could receive an overexposure to radiation.

The purpose of the Dec. 20th meeting is to obtain information to enable the NRC to determine what, if any, enforcement action is warranted. There will be an effort to come to a common understanding of the facts and discussion of root causes of the event and corrective actions undertaken by the company.

No decision will be made by the NRC staff at the session. Rather, NRC management will render a decision sometime in the near future.

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