



NRC NEWS

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION II

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NRC SCHEDULES CONFERENCE WITH AREVA TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT ITS RICHLAND, WASH. FUEL FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is scheduled to meet with representatives of AREVA NP, Inc. on Thursday, April 12, to discuss apparent violations of agency requirements involving a small hydrogen fluoride release at the company's Richland, Wash., facility in late October 2006. The NRC-licensed plant processes uranium and produces nuclear fuel for commercial nuclear power plants. The apparent violations were identified during an NRC special inspection beginning shortly after the event and subsequent reviews and teleconferences.

The predecisional enforcement conference with AREVA is scheduled to begin at 8:00 a.m. (EDT) in the NRC Region II Office, at 61 Forsyth Street SW, Suite 23T85, in Atlanta, Ga., and will be open to the public. The meeting is between AREVA and the NRC, but those people attending will have an opportunity to ask questions of NRC staff prior to the end of the meeting.

On the morning of Oct. 23, 2006, a technician at the AREVA Richland plant noticed an unusual odor which was determined to be hydrogen fluoride gas, a non-radioactive chemical used in processing uranium hexafluoride into nuclear fuel. No elevated radiation readings were recorded, personnel were warned that entering the area required respiratory protection equipment, and operations in that area were stopped. The technician was later admitted to the hospital for observation, but there was no exposure to other workers and no release offsite.

The NRC staff is satisfied that the company completed a thorough investigation and analysis of the event and has taken appropriate corrective actions, but NRC inspectors identified apparent violations involving event reporting, inappropriate respiratory protection equipment and inadequate engineering and administrative controls for small hydrogen fluoride releases.

The purpose of the April 12th meeting is to obtain information that will allow the NRC to determine what, if any, enforcement action is warranted. No decision will be made by the NRC staff at the meeting, but NRC management will make a decision sometime in the near future.

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