



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region III

2443 Warrenville Road

Lisle IL 60532

Web site: www.nrc.gov

No. III-09-031

October 29, 2009

Contact: Viktoria Mitlyng 630-829-9662

E-Mail: OPA3.RegionIII@nrc.gov

Prema Chandrathil 630-829-9663

NRC PROPOSES \$16,250 FINE AGAINST WESTINGHOUSE FOR VIOLATIONS DURING DECOMMISSIONING OF HEMATITE FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$16,250 fine against Westinghouse Electric Company for three violations of NRC requirements during decommissioning activities at the Hematite Decommissioning Project in Festus, Mo.

The Hematite facility processed uranium and fabricated nuclear fuel for use in commercial nuclear power plants from 1974 until 2001. Decommissioning activities began in 2002.

A routine inspection of decommissioning activities at the Hematite facility between Nov. 2008 and June 2009 revealed three violations 1) the deactivation of the nuclear criticality alarms before receiving NRC approval for alarm deactivation; 2) submittal of inaccurate information about the amount of uranium-235 remaining in the process building undergoing decommissioning – the information used by the NRC to make a decision regarding the deactivation of the criticality alarm; and 3) failure to provide adequate training to a health physics technician.

“The NRC has an important job to do: ensuring that this facility is safely decommissioned and the site restored to acceptable environmental conditions,” said Mark Satorius, regional administrator for NRC’s Region III in Lisle, Ill. “We take it very seriously when NRC license holders impede the agency’s ability to carry out its mission of protecting public health and safety. While no harm came to people or the environment at Hematite, two of the three violations show how the company’s actions interfered with the NRC’s ability to ensure public health and safety.”

NRC inspectors found that inaccurate information about the amount of uranium-235 in a building that was being decommissioned was provided to the NRC. This information was one of the factors considered in making a decision about allowing Westinghouse to deactivate the criticality alarm. As a result, the NRC’s decision to allow the deactivation of the criticality alarm was based on erroneous data.

The inspection also revealed that the criticality alarm system required by the NRC when there is a certain amount of radioactive material in the building had been removed without informing the agency. This occurred when the NRC was reviewing Westinghouse’s request to

deactivate the alarm. The alarm would not have been available in case of a nuclear incident, which could have led to a significant overexposure. NRC inspectors also found that a health physics technician employed at Hematite did not review training required by company policy to fulfill his duties.

Westinghouse Electric Company took action to prevent recurrence. Some of the corrective actions included improving work plans, revising work control procedures, training of employees, increasing the number of staff having appropriate technical knowledge, increasing management monitoring of operations, and revising procedures to address the need for ensuring accurate information.

These violations will result in an increase of NRC inspections. The company has 30 days to either pay the proposed fine or challenge it.

The NRC's letter, its enclosures, and the company's response will be available to the public through the agency's public electronic reading room at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in accessing these documents is available from the NRC Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209..

###

News releases are available through a free *listserv* subscription at the following Web address: <http://www.nrc.gov/public-involve/listserver.html>. The NRC homepage at www.nrc.gov also offers a SUBSCRIBE link. E-mail notifications are sent to subscribers when news releases are posted to NRC's Web site.