



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES CONFIRMATORY ORDER TO AREVA NP NUCLEAR FUEL PROCESSING FACILITY IN RICHLAND, WASH.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a Confirmatory Order to Areva NP's nuclear fuel processing facility in Richland, Wash., which has agreed to a series of corrective actions related to materials safety.

The settlement was achieved under the NRC's Alternative Dispute Resolution process, which was initiated at the request of Areva NP to address a willful violation of a facility safety procedure. On Jan. 6, the NRC notified Areva that an agency investigation determined that a plant employee had willfully defeated the function of a tool relied upon for safety.

The tool, an electronic sensor known as a vacuum wand interlock, is used to transfer uranium powder from a drum into the plant's processing system. During the powder processing, operators must block the wand's eye with their body to activate the vacuum transfer system. The employee deliberately bypassed the tool's safety function on April 21, 2009 by taping the wand's eye, violating an operating procedure. Even though the wand was used improperly, sufficient safety controls to prevent accident scenarios remained in place.

A mediation session was held on March 9 and a settlement was reached. A Confirmatory Order, issued Monday, outlines a number of corrective actions and enhancements Areva NP has agreed to take. Among the required actions are to communicate the facts of the incident and lessons learned internally and to all Areva special nuclear materials licensed facilities. All Areva U.S. fuel employees are to receive supplemental safety training incorporating the lessons learned.

As outlined in the order, the NRC agreed to refrain from issuing a Notice of Violation, a civil penalty or taking any other enforcement action. The company took disciplinary action against the employee involved in the incident and that employee is no longer employed at the facility.

Copies of the enforcement action will be posted on the NRC web site at www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions.

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