NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES CONFIRMATORY ORDER TO VIRGINIA FIRM IN WHISTLEBLOWER CASE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued an order to Soil Consultants, Inc., (SCI) of Manassas, Va., confirming a settlement agreement between the agency and the company resolving employee-protection complaints against SCI.

In the settlement, SCI agreed to pay a fine of $1,200 and to take additional corrective actions to promote a safety-conscious work environment. Those actions include hiring a contractor to develop a training course on employee protection for company managers and supervisors and implementing that training within six months.

The settlement was reached through the NRC's new alternative dispute resolution program, using a professional neutral mediator arranged through Cornell University's Institute on Conflict Resolution.

NRC's enforcement action stemmed from SCI's termination in August 2003 of a dispatcher it believed had reported safety concerns to the NRC. The NRC staff proposed an escalated fine of $9,600 because the violation was identified by the NRC rather than self-reported by the licensee, and because the company's corrective action was focused too narrowly and did not address management's understanding of NRC regulations on employee protection.

"This settlement shows the value of alternative dispute resolution in the NRC's enforcement process," said Frank J. Congel, director of the NRC's Office of Enforcement. "Soil Consultants, Inc., has committed to promote a safety-conscious work environment and educate its management about the employee-protection requirements in NRC regulations. While NRC will not pursue further enforcement action in this matter, we will evaluate SCI's implementation of the agreement in future inspections."

For more information about the agency's enforcement program, including details about significant enforcement actions, see the agency's Web site at http://www.nrc.gov/what-we-do/regulatory/enforcement.html .

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