



NRC NEWS

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NRC STAFF TO MEET SEPT. 6 WITH UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI ON POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS AT REACTOR FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet September 6 in Columbia, Missouri, with representatives of the University of Missouri for a predecisional enforcement conference to discuss possible safety violations at the university's non-power research reactor.

The meeting will be at 2 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Select, Executive Center, 2200 I-70 Dr., SW. The meeting is open to public observation. NRC staff members will be available at the close of the meeting for comments and questions from members of the public.

The possible violations were associated with incidents at the reactor facility occurring on April 12 and June 12. Both incidents involved a reduction in safety margins at the reactor facility, but did not result in any radiation overexposures or releases of radioactivity.

Prior to the April 12 incident, workers at the reactor facility removed shielding blocks from a portion of the reactor pool to inspect the pool liner. Then, during refueling operations on April 12, operators placed a fuel element in a storage location adjacent to the area where the shielding blocks had been removed. This created a high radiation area nearby, and a radiation alarm sounded.

The fuel element was subsequently returned to its original position, eliminating the high radiation level. No workers were in the area where the high radiation levels occurred.

The June 12 incident occurred while the reactor was shut down for maintenance. Reactor operators removed a control blade from the reactor without first removing two of the eight fuel elements in the reactor, as required by procedures. There are four control blades, which control the power level of the reactor. One blade is removed every six months for replacement.

The procedural requirement to remove two fuel elements from the reactor is to provide additional safety margin to prevent an unexpected startup of the reactor. No such startup occurred in the June 12 incident, and there were no safety consequences.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that a determination has been made that a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. The purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance, to provide the licensee with an

opportunity to point out errors that may have been made in NRC inspection reports and to enable the company to outline its proposed corrective actions.

No decision on the apparent violations or any contemplated enforcement action, such as a civil penalty, will be made at the conference. Those decisions will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

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