December 5, 2001

Mr. Gary N. Nugent
Chief Executive Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs
Nebraska/Western Iowa Health Care System
4101 Woolworth Avenue
Omaha, NE 68105

SUBJECT: NRC ROUTINE, ANNOUNCED INSPECTION REPORT NO. 50-131/2001-201

Dear Mr. Nugent:

This letter refers to the inspection conducted on August 28-30, 2001, at the Medical Center TRIGA Reactor Facility. The enclosed report presents the results of that inspection.

Areas examined during the inspection are identified in the report. Within these areas, the inspection consisted of selective examinations of procedures and representative records, interviews with personnel, and observations of activities in progress.

Based on the results of this inspection, no safety concern or noncompliance to NRC requirements was identified. No response to this letter is required. However, it was observed that the staffing supporting reactor operations is at the minimum level. This level may result in potential operational constraints. Based on our observations it was felt that the current operational staffing levels may warrant attention.

In accordance with 10 CFR 2.790 of the NRC's "Rules of Practice," a copy of this letter and its enclosure will be available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from the Publicly Available Records (PARS) component of NRC's document system (ADAMS). ADAMS is accessible from the NRC Web site at (the Public Electronic Reading Room) http://www.nrc.gov/NRC/ADAMS/index.html. If you have any questions, please contact Thomas Dragoun at 610-337-5373.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Patrick M. Madden, Section Chief
Non-Power Reactors and Financial Section
Operational Experience and Non-Power Reactors Branch
Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket No. 50-131
License No. R-57

Enclosure: NRC Inspection Report No. 50-131/2001-201

cc w/enclosure: Please see next page

Veterans Administration
Medical Center

Docket No. 50-131

cc:

Mayor
City of Omaha
Omaha, NE 68102

Mr. John P. Claassen
Reactor Manager/Supervisor
Omaha Veterans Administration
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*Please see previous concurrence

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U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Docket No:	50-131
License No:	R-57
Report No:	50-131/2001-201
Licensee:	Omaha Department of Veterans Affairs
Facility:	A. J. Blotcky Reactor Facility
Location:	Omaha, Nebraska
Dates:	August 28-30, 2001
Inspector:	Thomas F. Dragoun
Approved by:	Patrick M. Madden, Section Chief Non-Power Reactors and Financial Section Operational Experience and Non-Power Reactors Branch Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This routine, announced inspection included onsite review of selected aspects of the operations program, organizational structure and functions program, review and audit program, radiation protection program, environmental protection program, operator requalification program, surveillance program, procedural control program, emergency preparedness program, safeguards program and security program since the last NRC inspection of this program.

The licensee's programs were acceptably directed toward the protection of public health and safety, and in compliance with NRC requirements. However, management attention to refilling the vacant reactor operator position is encouraged.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS
The organizational structure and functions were consistent with Technical Specification requirements.

OPERATIONS
The operations program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

REVIEW AND AUDIT
The review and audit program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

RADIATION PROTECTION
The radiation protection program satisfied NRC requirements.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
The environmental protection program satisfied NRC requirements.

OPERATOR REQUALIFICATION
Operator requalification was conducted as required by the Requalification Program.

SURVEILLANCE
The surveillance program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

PROCEDURES
The procedure program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
The emergency preparedness program was conducted in accordance with the Emergency Plan.

SAFEGUARDS
Special Nuclear Materials were acceptably controlled and inventoried.

SECURITY
The NRC-approved security program was acceptably implemented.

Report Details

Summary of Plant Status

During the inspection the reactor was not operated. Records indicated that the reactor was periodically operated for training and equipment checks.

1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

a. Scope (Inspection Procedure (IP) 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- organization and staffing
- qualifications
- management responsibilities
- administrative controls

b. Observations and Findings

The organizational structure and staffing had not changed since the last inspection. The Reactor Supervisor (RS) remained the only licensed reactor operator. An operations trainee on staff during the last inspection (1999) left. The job was re-posted in March 2000 but remains unfilled with no prospects identified. Upper management attention to providing for adequate reactor operations staff was encouraged. Licensee action on this matter will be reviewed in a future inspection (Inspector Follow up Item 50-131/2001-201-01).

The management structure and staffing were as described in TS 6.0.

c. Conclusions

The organizational structure and functions were consistent with Technical Specification requirements.

2. OPERATIONS

a. Scope (IP 690001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- operational logs and records
- staffing during operations

b. Observations and Findings

The operating logs and records were clear and provided an indication of operational activities. The Reactor Supervisor conducted all operations as SRO at the control console with the on-call person identified in the log. The logs also

recorded maintenance and equipment changes such as installation of the new General Atomics console.

c. Conclusions

The operations program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

3. REVIEW AND AUDIT

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- Reactor Safeguards Committee membership
- personnel qualifications
- safety review and audit reports

b. Observations and Findings

Records showed that the Reactor Safeguards Committee membership, personnel qualifications, meeting frequency, and agenda satisfied the TS 6.5 requirements. The licensee indicated that a person from the nearby nuclear power station may be added to the committee. The audits required by TS 6.5.3 were conducted annually using a comprehensive and highly detailed checklist. Use of this checklist constituted a program strength.

c. Conclusions

The review and audit program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

4. RADIATION PROTECTION

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- the Radiation Protection Program
- radiological signs and posting
- routine surveys and monitoring
- dosimetry records
- maintenance and calibration of radiation monitoring equipment

b. Observations and Findings

The RS also acted as the Radiation Safety Officer (RSO). A documented radiation protection program was available as required by 10 CFR 20.1101. The RS performed periodic, approximately monthly, compliance checks with program requirements. The hospital RSO (a contractor) provided assistance to the RS,

including performance of the required annual review of the program. The RS stated that additional professional HP resources are being sought from a contractor in order to maintain program flexibility in the event the facility loses the technical support it receives from the hospital RSO. In addition, this flexibility is intended to provide qualified HP support for program audits. This licensee initiative (to seek backup HP resources for program support) is viewed as being pro-active and positive.

Caution signs, postings and controls to radiation areas were as required in 10 CFR 20, Subpart J. Radiation monitoring and survey activities were as required. Equipment used for these activities were maintained, calibrated and used acceptably.

The only permanently assigned personnel dosimeter belonged to the RS. His annual exposure was below the lower limit of detect ability. Visitors were issued self reading electronic dosimeters. No visitor exposures were recorded.

c. Conclusions

The radiation protection program satisfied NRC requirements.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- the environmental monitoring program
- monitoring results
- counting and analysis program

b. Observations and Findings

On line instrumentation continuously monitors the exhaust air and ambient radiation levels in the reactor facility. Dosimeters mounted on perimeter walls and in the primary water cooling “pit” recorded the accumulated dose. Dosimeters are processed bimonthly. A multichannel gamma spectroscopy system was available for sample analysis. Records and reports showed that all monitoring results were well below the NRC limits.

c. Conclusions

The environmental protection program satisfied NRC requirements.

6. OPERATOR REQUALIFICATION

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- the Requalification Program
- training and physical exam records
- operator examination records
- operator active duty status

b. Observations and Findings

The revised Requalification Program was approved by the NRC in February 2000. The only licensed operator, the Reactor Supervisor, maintained a log of self study topics. Records indicated that the physical examinations and required console manipulations were up to date. The RS stated that a contractor will be retained to develop a written exam at the end of the current requalification cycle. This current requalification cycle will end during the 2002 calendar year. The RS was commended for maintaining an effective program under his unique circumstances.

c. Conclusions

Operator requalification was conducted as required by the Requalification Program.

7. SURVEILLANCE

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- surveillance and calibration procedures,
- surveillance and calibration records

b. Observations and Findings

The RS was assisted with the conduct of surveillances by the instrument technician from the adjacent research facility. Surveillances and calibrations were completed on schedule and in accordance with licensee procedures. All the recorded results were within the TS and procedurally prescribed parameters.

c. Conclusions

The surveillance program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

8. PROCEDURES

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- administrative controls
- logs and records

b. Observations and Findings

Administrative controls of changes and temporary changes to procedures, and associated review and approval processes were as required. The format and content of procedures was detailed, clear and consistent. Procedures required by TS 6.7 were available.

c. Conclusions

The procedure program satisfied Technical Specification requirements.

9. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

a. Scope (IP 69001)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- the Emergency Plan
- implementing procedures
- emergency response supplies, equipment and instrumentation
- training records
- offsite support
- emergency drills and exercises

b. Observations and Findings

The Emergency Plan (E-Plan) was revised in April 2000 under the provisions in 10 CFR 50.54. The E-Plan was audited and reviewed biennially by the Veterans Administration Safety Manager. Implementing procedures were satisfactory. Emergency operation facility, and the required supplies, instrumentation and equipment were being maintained, controlled and inventoried as required in the E-Plan. The inspector verified the inventory of the emergency kit.

Agreements with local and State of Nebraska response organizations had been updated in 2000. The emergency drill required by the E-Plan was conducted in April 2001. The critique reported no weaknesses. Training for off-site and on-site personnel was conducted as stipulated by the E-Plan.

c. Conclusions

The emergency preparedness program was conducted in accordance with the Emergency Plan.

10. SAFEGUARDS

a. Scope (85102)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- nuclear material inventory and locations

- accountability records

b. Observations and Findings

Records indicated that all nuclear material was accurately accounted for. All Material Balance Reports (DOE/NRC Form-742 and 742c) submitted by the licensee for this period satisfied the requirements specified in 10 CFR 70.53.

Physical inventories were conducted annually as required by 10 CFR 70.51(d).

c. Conclusions

Special Nuclear Materials were acceptably controlled and inventoried.

11. SECURITY

a. Scope (IP 81421)

The inspector reviewed selected aspects of:

- the Physical Protection Plan
- police patrols
- records
- key control
- detection aids
- physical barriers

b. Observations and Findings

The Physical Protection Plan was the same as the latest revision approved by the NRC. The Plan was reviewed by the VA Chief of Police in 2000. No changes were recommended. Physical protection systems (barriers and alarms), equipment and instrumentation were as required by the Physical Protection Plan. Access control was as required.

c. Conclusions

The NRC-approved security program was acceptably implemented.

13. Exit Meeting Summary

The inspector presented the inspection results to members of licensee management at the conclusion of the inspection on August 30, 2001. The licensee acknowledged the findings presented.

PARTIAL LIST OF PERSONS CONTACTED

Licensee
M. Christensen, VA Hospital Radiation Safety Officer (contractor)
J. Claassen, Reactor Supervisor
G. Nugent, Chief Executive Officer

INSPECTION PROCEDURES USED

IP 69001	CLASS II NON-POWER REACTORS
IP 81431	FIXED SITE PHYSICAL PROTECTION OF SNM OF LOW STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE
IP 85102	MATERIAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTING

ITEMS OPENED, CLOSED, AND DISCUSSED

OPENED:
50-131/2001-201-01 IFI Fill vacant reactor operator position.

CLOSED:
None

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
HP	Health Physics
IFI	Inspector Follow-up Item
IP	Inspection Procedure
NRC	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
RS	Reactor Supervisor
RSO	Radiation Safety Officer
SNM	Special nuclear material
SRO	Senior Reactor Operator
TS	Technical Specifications
VA	Veterans Administration