



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION III

801 Warrenville Road

Lisle, IL 60532

Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA>

No. III-01-047

October 23, 2001

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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$3,000 FINE AGAINST THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA FOR VIOLATING REGULATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$3,000 fine against the University of Missouri-Columbia in Columbia, Missouri, for violating NRC regulations associated with employee protection requirements.

An NRC investigation found that a former research scientist at the University of Missouri Research Reactor (MURR) was given an oral warning after he talked to a Department of Energy official about the level of commercial activity done at the university's research reactor. The scientist was told that he was "not authorized to discuss MURR management, priorities, etc. with any government (state or federal) officials." The NRC staff found that this statement would prohibit, restrict and discourage the scientist from raising safety concerns.

"This violation is of concern to the NRC because of a similar violation which was identified by the NRC in 1994...involving discrimination against employees for raising safety issues at MURR," said David B. Matthews, Director of the NRC's Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs. "The NRC is concerned that lasting corrective actions be implemented to ensure that safety questions are freely raised and addressed at MURR."

As a result of a second NRC investigation, the NRC staff concluded that MURR management had created a potential chilling effect on employees reporting safety concerns. The NRC earlier this year required the university to assess the freedom university employees have to report problems without fear of retaliation, and to assess its corrective actions program.

In issuing the \$3,000 fine, the NRC staff noted that the university had taken a number of additional corrective actions including establishing an ombudsman program to receive safety concerns.

The university has until November 21, 2001, to pay the fine or protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the university may request a hearing.

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