



NRC NEWS

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NRC PROPOSES \$90,000 FINE FOR SCHLUMBERGER TECHNOLOGY CORP.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a fine of \$90,000 against Schlumberger Technology Corp. (STC) of Sugar Land, Texas, for violations of NRC radioactive material handling regulations stemming from an incident in which 13 oilfield workers received exposures in excess of NRC's annual limits for members of the public.

In a letter to the company, Bruce Mallett, Administrator of the NRC's Region IV office in Arlington, Texas, said that during an NRC inspection completed on April 28, the agency determined that a well-logging crew "willfully failed to perform required radiation surveys that were intended to assure that the (radioactive) source had been returned to its shielded container before the crew left the well site," near Havre, Montana, on May 21, 2002.

As a result, Mr. Mallett said, 13 workers received exposures in excess of NRC's annual public exposure limits. "While none of the oilfield workers received a radiation exposure that is considered harmful (i.e., the highest estimated exposure was 0.4 rem, less than 10 percent of the annual allowable dose for radiation workers), the NRC takes seriously any incident that results in members of the public being unnecessarily exposed to radioactive material." The oilfield workers are considered members of the public because they were not expected to be exposed to any radiation during the normal course of their duties.

Mr. Mallett noted that the circumstances involved in this incident are cause for particular concern. "The incident resulted from a willful violation of STC's procedures by logging crew members," he said. "Two of the three individuals on the crew failed to perform the required radiation surveys and falsified logs by certifying that they had done the surveys."

STC's corrective actions following a similar incident in Edinburg, Texas, in August 2001 "apparently failed to instill in this logging crew the importance of performing required surveys and of assuring the integrity of required records," Mr. Mallett said. "The actions of STC's

logging crew resulted in 31 members of the public being unnecessarily exposed to radiation from STC's loss of control of a CS-137 (cesium) well-logging source, 13 of them over the annual exposure limit."

In a June 26, 2002 letter to the NRC, STC described its corrective action plan which included recovery of the source and return to its shielded container; disciplinary action against the three employees involved; the dissemination of information about this incident to all STC logging operations in the U.S.; and plans to modify employee training.

STC officials met with NRC officials in Great Falls, Montana, May 30, to discuss the violations. The NRC has proposed a \$90,000 fine against STC. This includes \$78,000 for the 13 public radiation doses in excess of NRC limits, each assessed a \$6,000 civil penalty; \$6,000 for the willful failure to perform radiation surveys, and failure to maintain control of the source; and \$6,000 for a failure to follow emergency procedures and secure the source after it was found. Each of the violations is a Severity Level III violation, or problem. The agency uses a four-level severity scale on which Severity Level I is the most serious.

The NRC letter, its enclosures, and the company's response will be made available to interested members of the public through the agency's electronic reading room at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in accessing these documents is available from the NRC Public Document Room at (301) 415-4737 or at 1-800-397-4209.

The company has 30 days from receipt of the letter to either pay the civil penalty or to protest its imposition.

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