



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I

475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. 19406

www.nrc.gov

No. I-03-071

CONTACT: Diane Screnci, 610/337-5330
Neil Sheehan, 610/337-5331

November 28, 2003

Email: opa1@nrc.gov

NRC PROPOSES \$3,000 FINE AGAINST OHIO FIRM FOR LOSING RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$3,000 fine against an Ohio company for losing a small amount of radioactive material in Virginia.

On July 30, while at a temporary job site in Glasgow, Va., workers for ABB, Inc., of Columbus, Ohio, were taking apart three nuclear gauges in preparation for shipping the radioactive capsules contained within them to the firm's Ohio facility. (Nuclear gauges are used for a variety of industrial purposes, including measuring the density of soil or testing the structural integrity of roads and bridges.) During the course of that dismantlement work, a sealed capsule holding 78 millicuries of strontium-90, a radioactive material, was lost.

ABB was unable to specifically determine how the capsule was lost. However, it has concluded, based on an investigation, that the capsule must have inadvertently fallen out of its holder and been swept up with other debris. The company has also concluded that the capsule was most likely placed in a dumpster and sent to a sanitary landfill in Rockbridge County, Va., since a physical search and radiation surveys conducted at the job site did not identify any radioactive material.

The NRC has identified one violation of its requirements in relation to the incident. Because the capsule is believed to be buried in a landfill, the risk of public exposure is considered to be minimal. However, the violation is of concern to the agency because 1.) the loss resulted from a failure to properly control radioactive material that was not in storage; and 2.) such material can cause a substantial unintended radiation dose to an individual if placed in close contact with the individual's skin. The amount of radioactive material involved would be insufficient on its own for the creation of a so-called "dirty bomb."

ABB has until December 20 to either pay the fine or protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the company may request a hearing.

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The letter notifying the company of the proposed fine will be posted to the NRC web site at:
www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions/.

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