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NRC TO DISCUSS VIOLATIONS INVOLVING MARCUS HOOK, PA., COMPANY

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of a Marcus Hook, Pa., company on Wed., March 15, to discuss several apparent violations identified during an NRC inspection, as well as the firm's corrective actions. The apparent violations involved exposures exceeding regulatory limits to employees and contractors of Epsilon Products Co. who are not occupational radiation workers.

The predecisional enforcement conference is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. at the NRC Region I Office in King of Prussia, Pa. It will be open to the public for observation, and there will be an opportunity for attendees to ask questions of the NRC staff before the session is adjourned.

On Aug. 27 of last year, Epsilon notified the NRC that a gauge containing radioactive material (cesium-137) had malfunctioned at its Marcus Hook site, with its radioactive source failing to retract to the shielded position. The gauge was installed outside of a chemical process tank in order to monitor the buildup of polymerized material within the tank. Subsequent radiological surveys and interviews conducted by the company determined that eight of 32 individual workers who cleaned the interior of the tank between Aug. 24 and 25 received a radiation dose in excess of 100 millirems. It is not expected that these exposures will result in adverse health effects for the exposed individuals.

In response to the event, the NRC performed a Special Inspection at the facility between last Aug. 30 and Jan. 17 of this year, with the inspectors identifying six apparent violations. They include: 1.) conduct of licensed activities such that eight employees and contractors received doses in excess of 100 millirems in a year; 2.) dose rates in unrestricted areas not maintained below 2 millirems in any 1 hour; 3.) failure to make appropriate radiological surveys; 4.) failure to provide appropriate training to an authorized user of radioactive materials; 5.) not using a device containing licensed radioactive material in accordance with the provisions of its registration certificate; and 6.) failure to develop appropriate operating and emergency operating procedures.

A millirem is a measure of exposure to radiation. The average American is exposed to about 360 millirems of radiation exposure each year from natural and manmade sources.

The fact that the NRC is holding a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean the agency has determined violations have occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose of the March 15th meeting will be to gather information to enable the NRC to make a decision regarding any enforcement action.

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