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Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 301/415-8200

Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

E-mail: opa@nrc.gov

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

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH REACTOR

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a special inspection at Texas A&M University's Nuclear Science Center Research Reactor, following a reported potential radiation overexposure of one of its workers.

The university reported the potential overexposure on March 15 (event report # 42424 at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/2006/20060316en.html>) indicating that an employee involved in neutron activation analysis work at the Texas A&M Nuclear Science Center potentially received 76 rem to the right hand during the month of January. The annual radiological exposure limit for extremities is 50 rem.

The licensee stated that there were no increased radiation levels around the reactor, nor were there any unusual processes that could have caused an unanticipated increase in radiation levels and, therefore, the licensee had not considered the indicated dose reading accurate. According to the licensee, the individual also potentially received 38 rem to the same hand during the month of February. Once this second potential high exposure was found, the licensee reported the potential overexposure. The licensee's investigation is ongoing.

On March 20, an NRC inspector responded to the research facility and will stay on to lead the special inspection. The inspectors will seek to understand the circumstances surrounding the event and its probable causes, including conditions preceding the event, chronology, equipment performance, precursors, human factors considerations, quality assurance considerations, and radiological considerations.

A written report of the special inspection will be issued about 45 days following the completion of the inspection. It will be available on the NRC website. Texas A&M's research reactor was licensed to operate in 1961 by NRC's predecessor, the Atomic Energy Commission.

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