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

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Email: opa1@nrc.gov

NRC TO MEET WITH NEW JERSEY HOSPITAL OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with officials of St. Peter's University Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., to discuss an apparent violation of NRC requirements. The apparent violation was found during an NRC inspection at the hospital on Aug. 2.

The meeting, called a pre-decisional enforcement conference, will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 8, in the NRC Region I office, 475 Allendale Road in King of Prussia. The conference is open to the public for observation. If necessary, portions will be closed to discuss security aspects of the apparent violation. The NRC staff will be available to answer questions before the meeting is adjourned.

The hospital is licensed by NRC to use radioactive materials for treatment and diagnosis, including the use of a High Dose Rate Afterloader (HDR), which uses radioactive sources -- in this case iridium-192 -- that are placed near tumors to treat cancer. During a tour of the facility, the NRC inspector found that although the HDR unit was locked to the treatment room floor, the keys to the lock were readily accessible in a cabinet above the unit, and the treatment room was not locked and no staff member was in the vicinity. This is an apparent violation of NRC regulations, which require that the source be secured from unauthorized removal.

The hospital immediately took action to store the keys away from the unit, and then took further action to assure the unit was stored in a locked cabinet when not in use.

The decision to hold a pre-decisional enforcement conference does not mean that the NRC has determined a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to discuss the apparent violation, including its causes and safety significance; to provide the hospital with an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the hospital to outline its proposed corrective action.

No decision on the apparent violation will be made at this conference. That decision will be made by NRC officials at a later time, after considering the information developed during the inspection and the information provided by the hospital at the conference.

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