



NRC NEWS

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs Region IV

611 Ryan Plaza Drive - Suite 400

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No. IV-07-029

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August 20, 2007

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NRC ISSUES LICENSE FOR IRRADIATOR IN HONOLULU, HAWAII

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a license to operate a commercial pool-type irradiator adjacent to the Honolulu International Airport. The company, Pa'ina Hawaii, LLC, stated in its application that the facility would be used to irradiate fresh fruit and vegetables bound for the mainland from the Hawaiian islands, cosmetic and pharmaceutical products, as well as research and development projects.

NRC reviews irradiator applications to ensure facilities, procedures and equipment are adequate to protect employees and public health, safety and the environment in the vicinity of the facility from unnecessary irradiation. Other federal agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration, are responsible for the safety of food and determine the types of food that may be irradiated.

Pa'ina applied to the NRC for a license on June 27, 2005. The NRC staff performed a thorough safety review of the application, including:

- An acceptance review to ensure the application contained sufficient information;
- A public meeting in Honolulu on August 31, 2005 to describe the NRC review process for the application;
- A technical review of the radiological health, safety and security aspects of the application using the agency's regulations and guidance;
- An internal peer review of the technical thoroughness of the staff's review; and visits to the site by senior managers from the NRC's Region IV office; and
- An assessment of the impact of the proposed operation on the environment.

On October 3, 2005, Earthjustice, on behalf of Concerned Citizens of Honolulu, submitted to the NRC a request for a public hearing citing safety and environmental concerns. On January 24, 2006, NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board granted the petitioner's request for a public hearing to determine admissibility of their contentions.

Typically, the licensing of irradiators is categorically excluded from an environmental review, as described in the NRC regulations. However, the NRC staff decided it was prudent to do so in this case. It entered into a settlement agreement with Concerned Citizens of Honolulu which included a provision for the NRC staff to prepare an environmental assessment and hold a public meeting in Honolulu prior to making a final decision. The environmental assessment considered potential impacts from transportation of the radioactive material, socioeconomics, ecology, water quality, and potential effects of aviation accidents from the nearby airport and natural phenomena.

NRC staff held a second public meeting in Honolulu on February 1, which drew about 100 people, to seek public comment on the draft environmental assessment. The NRC staff has issued a final environmental assessment for the proposed irradiator resulting in a “Finding of No Significant Impact”. NRC believes this final environmental assessment addresses the comments received during the public meetings and the remaining safety and environmental concerns. The document is available on the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/materials.html> by selecting “Pa’ina Irradiator” in the Quick Links box.

Based on this detailed review, the NRC has issued a license to Pa’ina allowing the possession and use of radioactive sources in an irradiator. The NRC will inspect key aspects of the construction of the facility to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of its license before the facility begins operations. Further, the NRC will continue to perform periodic unannounced inspections of the facility to ensure its operations adhere to NRC requirements.

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