

J. L. SHEPHERD ORDER

JULY 3, 1984

UNITED STATES

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

URGENT NOTICE

TO ALL LICENSEES WHO POSSESS J. L. SHEPHERD IRRADIATORS

An NRC licensee recently identified a malfunction in the lock mechanism of its J. L. Shepherd self-shielded irradiator which could have resulted in a radiation overexposure. Although no overexposure appears to have occurred, the potential hazard warrants immediate preventive action. Therefore, we have prepared the enclosed Order which requires the use of radiation survey equipment when the irradiators are being used.

If you possess a J. L. Shepherd Mark I or Model 81-22 self-shielded irradiator, do not use it unless you provide appropriate radiation monitoring as specified in the Order. If you do not currently possess the appropriate equipment, you must obtain it before you resume use of your irradiator. Also, you should report any problems to your nearest NRC regional office immediately. Do not attempt to repair an irradiator, or allow anyone else to attempt repairs, unless specific authorization for repair of the irradiator which you possess is provided in an NRC license.

We suggest that you review who has access to your irradiator, and establish strict controls to assure that no untrained personnel have access. Trained persons who continue to use the irradiator should conduct careful radiation surveys as specified in the Order. Irradiator doors should be opened slowly, to minimize any accidental exposure and to avoid "blinking out" of instruments due to high exposure rates. Any unusual meter reading should be taken as evidence of a problem.

We are including in this mailing certain licensees about which we are uncertain whether they possess J. L. Shepherd irradiators. If you do not possess a J. L. Shepherd irradiator, please disregard this notice.

Because this Order is effective immediately, it is important that you notify your radiation safety personnel immediately, and retain this Order with your license records. Questions and comments may be directed to your nearest NRC regional office.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Richard E. Cunningham, Director

Division of Fuel Cycle and Material Safety

Enclosure: Order Modifying License

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555

ORDER MODIFYING CERTAIN LICENSES (EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY)

I

Recently, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff was notified by a licensee of the failure of a locking mechanism on a self-shielded irradiator which could have resulted in a radiation overexposure. ("Self-shielded" irradiators are designed so that the radioactive source remains in a shielded position at all times, both during storage and during irradiations. Therefore, the irradiators need not be placed in a shielded room.)

The irradiator is a J. L. Shepherd Mark I, containing about 6,000 curies of cesium 137. The unit is operated as follows: (1) With the source in its shielded storage position, the shielded door is opened, (2) materials to be irradiated are placed inside the irradiator chamber, (3) the shielded door is closed, (4) the radioactive source is raised into the irradiation chamber, (5) after irradiation is complete, the source is lowered, and (6) the door is opened for removal of irradiated materials.

The shielded door is interlocked so that it should not open when the radioactive source is in the irradiation chamber. However, in the case reported to NRC, the lock mechanism failed. In such a situation, an operator who opens the shielded door with the source raised could be subjected to substantial radiation exposure. The J. L. Shepherd Model 81-22 irradiator employs an interlock similar to the Mark I.

The NRC staff has examined the irradiator in question and confirmed the defect. Furthermore, a New York City inspector checking a J. L. Shepherd Mark I irradiator in New York reported a malfunctioning interlock system. NRC and the Agreement States are studying the problem further to assess its generic implications.

Based on the foregoing, I have concluded that the possibility of failure of locking mechanisms and/or mechanical timers on J. L. Shepherd Mark I and Model 81-22 irradiators represents a potential radiation hazard warranting immediate preventive action pending further investigation. I have determined, therefore, that the public health, safety, and interest require that the restrictions on the use of such irradiators as prescribed in Section II of this Order should be made immediately effective.

II

Accordingly, pursuant to Sections 81, 116 I, 162 o, and 182 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, and 10 CFR Parts 2 and 30 of the Commission's regulations, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, THAT:

Each license that authorizes possession of byproduct material in a J. L. Shepherd Mark I or Model 81-22 self-shielded irradiator is hereby amended to add the following conditions:

1. The J. L. Shepherd irradiator shall not be used unless the licensee provides a calibrated and operable radiation survey meter or room monitor for use with the irradiator.
2. The irradiator door shall not be opened until the operator has checked visual indicators to verify that the source has returned to its safe storage position.
3. Each room monitor (a) shall be operable at all times when the irradiator is in use, (b) shall activate a visible and audible alarm when radiation levels exceed 2 millirems per hour, (c) shall be located to detect any radiation escaping from the irradiator door, and (d) shall be located so that it is visible to the irradiator user when he is next to the irradiator.
4. If a room monitor is not installed, a survey meter shall be used (a) to determine the radiation level at the irradiator door when the door is closed, and (b) to check for any increase in radiation levels each time the irradiator door is opened. In conducting such checks, operators shall position themselves so as to minimize exposure to any radiation escaping from the open door.
5. If abnormal radiation levels or any malfunction of the irradiator are detected at any time, the licensee shall stop use of the irradiator and immediately notify the appropriate NRC regional office by telephone.
6. The licensee shall not attempt repair or authorize others to attempt repair of the irradiator except as specifically authorized in a license issued by NRC.

III

Any affected licensee may request a hearing on this Order. A request for a hearing shall be submitted within twenty (20) days of the date of this Order to Mr. R. E. Cunningham, Director, Division of Fuel Cycle and Material Safety, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555, with a copy to the Executive Legal Director, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, D.C. 20555. ANY REQUEST FOR A HEARING SHALL NOT STAY THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS ORDER.

IV

If a hearing is requested, the Commission will issue an Order designating the time and place of any such hearing. If a hearing is held the issue to be considered at such a hearing will be: Whether, on the basis of the matters set forth in Section 1 and II of this Order, this Order should be sustained.

FOR THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

/RA/

Richard E. Cunningham, Director
Division of Fuel Cycle and Material Safety
Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards

Dated at Bethesda, Maryland
this 3rd day of July, 1984