

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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101 Marietta Street, Suite 2900
Atlanta, Georgia 30323

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Contact: Ken Clark or Roger Hannah
Telephone: (404) 331-5503 or 331-7878

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NRC TO SEND SPECIAL INSPECTION TEAM TO BRISTOL, VIRGINIA
TO REVIEW INDUSTRIAL WORKER'S OVEREXPOSURE TO RADIATION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff announced Friday that it will send a special Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) next week to Bristol, Virginia to review circumstances associated with an apparent overexposure to the hand of a worker using a radioactive device to measure the density of soil at a number of temporary job sites this year.

Professional Service Industries, Inc., of Bristol notified the NRC on November 6 that a technician had reported a concern that reddening and blisters on the hand may have resulted from radiation exposure. The technician had operated a gauging device containing up to 10 millicuries of radioactive cesium-137 in a source at the end of a rod and up to 50 millicuries of americium-241 within the gauge housing. The cesium source is housed within the gauge and pushed out and into the ground during use.

NRC officials said the technician reported routinely touching the cesium source during operation due to difficulties in pushing it out of its housing during a six-month period. Based upon November 8 interviews with the technician and a reenactment of events, the company determined that the technician probably received an overexposure to the hand of more than 50 rems, the NRC's annual limit for such exposure. The NRC concurs that the technician probably exceeded the regulatory limit by a significant amount.

The NRC's regional office in Atlanta has issued a Confirmatory Action Letter to the company to document proposed corrective actions. The AIT will arrive at the site next week to review circumstances associated with the event, including a determination of the dose to the technician's hand, the cause of the gauge malfunction, and training of licensee personnel.

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