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Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$16,000 FINE AGAINST
CONAM INSPECTION FOR RADIATION SAFETY VIOLATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$16,000 fine against Conam Inspection, Itasca, Illinois, for violations associated with a radiographer receiving an occupational radiation dose in excess of annual federal limits.

The violations were identified in an NRC inspection and investigation beginning in April of last year as a result of an event in which a radiographer received a radiation dose in the range between 6 to 9 rems because of failing to follow procedures. NRC's annual occupational dose limit is 5 rems.

(Five rems is the same as 5,000 millirems. For comparison, the average person in the United States receives about 300 millirems per year from natural background radiation.)

Radioactive sealed sources are used in industrial testing processes for such things as finding flaws in steel parts or welds. Radiation generated by the radioisotope is used to produce an x-ray like image.

In February of last year, the radiographer, upon completion of a radiographic exposure at a job site, retracted the radioactive source into the camera. However, he failed to follow Conam's procedures to securely lock the radioactive source in the shielded position. The source apparently did not fully retract and engage the automatic locking mechanism. Therefore, as he changed film cassettes, the radiographer was exposed to the unshielded source for approximately four minutes.

After retracting the source, the radiographer also did not, as required under an NRC license, complete a radiation survey to check that the source had returned to its shielded position.

In a letter to the company, NRC's Regional Administrator, A. Bill Beach said:

"...based on the Office of Investigations findings, the NRC concludes that the radiographer's failure to lock the radiographic exposure device is willful in that his actions demonstrated careless disregard for NRC requirements."

Conam restricted the radiographer from further involvement with the company's radioactive material for the remainder of year. The company also issued a memorandum to all radiation safety supervisory personnel about the event and the proper procedures.

Conam Inspection has until July 8 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the company may request a hearing.

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