



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 06-123

October 4, 2006

NRC TRITIUM TASK FORCE ISSUES REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, FINDS NO HEALTH IMPACT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission today issued the findings of a group of experts from throughout the agency, as well as the State of Illinois, concerning inadvertent, unmonitored releases of radioactive liquids, containing primarily tritium, from U.S. commercial nuclear power plants. The task force found no impact on public health from these events.

“We looked at a wide range of releases that go back to 1996, and even included a substantial release from the Hatch plant in 1986, and none of these events led to appreciable radiation doses to people outside the plants,” said Stuart Richards, the NRC senior manager who led the task force. “There are, however, areas of our regulations that could better cover these sorts of inadvertent spills and leaks.”

For instance, many of the components and systems that have leaked are built to standards less strict than those for systems needed for reactor safety. A number of the systems involved in the releases also fall outside the NRC’s requirements for regular maintenance and inspections, increasing the possibility that leaks might go undetected.

The task force produced 26 recommendations that apply to the NRC, nuclear power plant operators or both. For instance, the task force recommended updating NRC regulations on monitoring radioactive releases and the environment in and around a plant, to take into account state-of-the-art technology and practices. The task force also recommended that nuclear power plant operators work with local and state agencies to voluntarily report information on radioactive liquid releases that otherwise fall below NRC reporting requirements. Each of the NRC’s program offices (e.g., Nuclear Reactor Regulation) will consider the recommendations relevant to their mission.

The full report, as well as additional information on inadvertent releases, will be available on the NRC Web site at this address:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reactors/operating/ops-experience/grndwtr-contam-tritium.html> .

The task force included staff from each of the NRC's regional offices, as well as the Offices of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, Nuclear Regulatory Research, Public Affairs, and Executive Director for Operations. The Illinois Emergency Management Agency also provided a representative to the task force.

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