



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$16,250 FINE AGAINST GLOBAL NUCLEAR FUELS FOR VIOLATIONS AT WILMINGTON NUCLEAR FUEL PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$16,250 civil penalty against Global Nuclear Fuel – Americas, L.L.C., for incorrectly categorizing an emergency level declaration during a Jan. 30 incident at the plant’s low-enriched uranium processing line in Wilmington, N.C.

NRC officials said violations occurred when moisture was introduced into a Dry Conversion Process cooling hopper containing uranium dioxide powder which was initially believed to be above safe critical mass limits. A criticality event is an unanticipated nuclear reaction resulting in an undesired release of radiation.

No actual consequences resulted from the event, and it did not result in a criticality accident. Company representatives later told the NRC at a pre-decisional enforcement conference that the system was undergoing maintenance testing and that the company later determined that a criticality event was not possible because one of two moisture control interlocks remained operational during the test, preventing excess moisture from entering the cooling hopper. The company said it was determined that the hopper contained a safe amount of uranium dioxide, moisture in the powder was within normal limits, and that long-term corrective action had been taken to prevent recurrence.

NRC officials said in this case corrective actions were prompt and comprehensive and that no civil penalty was being proposed.

However, the NRC said another violation caused the agency to propose the fine. It was associated with declaration by the company of an incorrect emergency action level. Company representatives told the NRC that an Alert was declared based on information available at the time of the event. However, the company initially declared the event as an “Off-Normal Condition” and upgraded it to an Alert 11 minutes later without obtaining any new information. The NRC staff said the company failed to follow its own procedure that would have initially categorized the event as an Alert, based on information at the time of the event that indicated a potential for a criticality existed.

The company has 30 days in which to either pay the civil penalty or to protest its imposition, in whole or in part.

A copy of the NRC letter, its enclosures and the company's response will be made available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public document Room in Washington, D.C., and from the NRC document system (ADAMS) accessible from the NRC web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. NRC also includes significant enforcement actions on its web site at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions/>.

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