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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT NUCLEAR FUEL SERVICES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has dispatched a special inspection team to the Nuclear Fuel Services facility in Erwin, Tenn., to inspect and assess circumstances associated with an incident on Oct. 13 involving the dissolution of scrap material from Department of Energy projects containing low levels of uranium.

This process required modifications to NFS operations to process the material in a safe manner. During addition of nitric acid into the system on Oct. 13, the solution produced higher than expected levels of heat and nitrous oxide fumes. The operator shut down the operation and the area was evacuated. Although there were no employee injuries or environmental releases, the heated fumes damaged some of the piping system.

The NRC resident inspectors at the NFS site initially responded, but the agency determined that it was appropriate to launch a special inspection team, which is comprised of the NRC senior resident inspector at another fuel facility as team leader and four inspectors from the NRC Region II office in Atlanta.

“The members of our special inspection team will carefully examine what happened with special emphasis on the NFS decision-making processes before, during and after the incident,” said NRC Region II Administrator Luis Reyes.

The special inspection team will review all the circumstances surrounding the incident, and the results will be used as a basis for any necessary follow-up action. In addition to reviewing the NFS decision-making processes, the inspectors will evaluate the company’s corrective actions and plans to prevent recurrence.

The inspection will continue for about one week on site with additional reviews of information at the NRC Region II office in Atlanta. The special inspection team will issue a written report 30 days after the completion of the inspection.

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