



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I
475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. 19406

Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. I-10-044

Contact: Diane Screnci, 610/337-5330

Neil Sheehan, 610/337-5331

October 22, 2010

E-mail: opa1@nrc.gov

NRC ISSUES \$34,000 FINE TO INDIANA, PA., FIRM OVER HANDLING OF RADIOACTIVE SOURCES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is proposing a \$34,000 fine for a Pennsylvania-based company for several violations associated with its use of radioactive materials. The violations include the improper control of radioactive materials while in transport; a failure to report the temporary loss of two sealed radioactive sources; a failure to perform required radiological surveys of vehicles used to transport such materials; and the deliberate falsification of survey records.

The company, Superior Well Services, Ltd., is based in Indiana, Pa. Pennsylvania is an Agreement State, or a state which has signed an agreement with the NRC to oversee radioactive materials within its borders that the NRC would normally regulate. In this case, the violations involving Superior Well Services occurred in West Virginia, which is not an Agreement State. Therefore, the NRC is taking enforcement action for these violations.

From July 23, 2009, to July 22, 2010, the NRC technical staff conducted an inspection of Superior Well Service's licensed activities in the area of radiation safety and the circumstances surrounding a loss-of-radioactive material event that occurred on Sept. 20, 2008. During the same period, an investigation of the activities was carried out by the NRC's Office of Investigations. The reviews took place at the company's facilities in Buckhannon, W.Va.; Sophia, W.Va.; and Gaylord, Mich. The NRC also held a Predecisional Enforcement Conference with company officials on Sept. 2, 2010, to discuss apparent violations identified during the NRC reviews.

Based on the inspection and investigation, as well as information provided during the conference, the NRC has identified five violations of agency regulations by Superior Well Services.

Three of the violations stem from the Sept. 20, 2008, event, during which two sealed radioactive sources used for well logging – an oil and gas exploration technique -- fell off a company truck while being transported. One of the violations involved a failure to properly secure the packages containing the licensed radioactive material from shifting when the vehicle was in motion. As a result, when the truck reportedly hit a large pothole on Interstate 79 in West

Virginia, the weld securing the source plate to the vehicle broke, causing the radioactive sources to fall off and consequently be left unattended by the side of a public highway. The second violation involved a failure to control and maintain constant surveillance of the sources while they were on the highway, which is an unrestricted area. The sources remained unattended for approximately 90 minutes until Superior Well Services personnel located and retrieved the sources. The third violation involved the company's failure to immediately report the event to the NRC, as required. The NRC inspection and investigation found that company employees who were aware of the event did not recognize the need to file such a report, leading to Superior Well Services not submitting one until July 23, 2009.

“Although the sources remained inside their locked, shielded transport containers, and no member of the public appears to have been exposed to radiation from these sources during the ninety minutes they were unattended on the highway, the potential existed for significant exposure or a malevolent use to occur if an unauthorized individual had retrieved the sources and breached the containers,” NRC Region I Deputy Administrator Marc Dapas wrote in a letter to Superior Well Services regarding the enforcement action.

The other two violations being cited by the NRC pertain to a failure to conduct required radiological surveys of vehicles transporting licensed radioactive materials and a deliberate falsification of survey records for these vehicles. Specifically, former Superior Well Services employees told the NRC that on numerous occasions they did not perform these surveys but instead completed the associated forms by copying data from previously completed forms.

“The falsification of radiological survey records is of particular concern to the NRC because the actions of the employees were deliberate,” Mr. Dapas wrote. “The employees who admitted to the NRC that they had falsified survey records indicated that they did so because they did not know how to use the survey instruments.”

Superior Well Services has 30 days to respond to the enforcement action.

#