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Contact: [Diane Screnci](#), 610-337-5330

[Neil Sheehan](#), 610-337-5331

NRC Begins Special Inspection at Maryland NIST Facility

A five-member Nuclear Regulatory Commission team is conducting a special inspection at a National Institute of Standards and Technology facility in Gaithersburg, Md., following a recent incident in which a worker was potentially exposed to radioactive contamination. The inspection began Sept. 26, 2017.

On the afternoon of Aug. 18, a glass ampule holding americium-241, which is radioactive, broke in a laboratory at the facility. That breakage led to the contamination of a storage area and surfaces in the lab.

Tests results indicated that one NIST employee who entered the lab potentially received a dose above NRC annual occupational limits. Additional testing is being performed on the individual to determine the actual dose.

The NRC team is reviewing the circumstances surrounding the event, NIST's corrective actions, and the testing done to determine if an overexposure occurred. The results of the inspection will be documented in a report to be issued within 45 of the days of the review's completion.

NRC inspectors have been gathering information related to the event since it was reported to the agency on Aug. 19, and previously sent two inspectors to the facility on Sept. 13.