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FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE TESTIMONY AND NEWS REPORTS ABOUT SECURITY OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS IN HOSPITALS

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently testified before Congress on preliminary results of an ongoing audit of radioactive material security in U.S. hospitals and other medical facilities. The testimony included several anecdotes illustrating GAO's security concerns and prompted media coverage stating that hazardous radioactive materials were being left unprotected in the nation's hospitals.

In fact, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Agreement State¹ agencies have implemented robust security measures that are appropriate to the facilities in question and the level of security risk posed by the radioactive materials these facilities possess. These measures, initiated in 2005 through Orders issued by the NRC and the states, reflect the agency's strong priority of ensuring the security and control of radioactive materials. One media report claimed that the NRC has written "very flexible rules in order to avoid adding to hospitals' costs." The NRC is required to consider the cost burden to licensees during development of any new regulatory requirement; however, the agency's focus remains on setting appropriate security requirements to ensure protection of public safety.

The NRC's security program is a multi-layered, non-prescriptive framework that allows licensees to develop security programs specifically tailored to their facilities. Key elements of the program include:

- *Background checks, including fingerprinting, to ensure that people with access to radioactive material are **trustworthy and reliable**.*
- ***Personnel access controls** to areas where radioactive material is stored or used.*
- ***Security plans or procedures** designed to detect, deter, assess and respond to unauthorized access attempts.*
- ***Coordination and response planning** between licensees and local law enforcement agencies.*
- ***Coordination and tracking** of shipments of radioactive material.*
- ***Security barriers** to discourage theft of portable devices containing radioactive material.*

The NRC and the Agreement States regularly inspect licensees to ensure that their security programs meet these requirements.

¹ Agreement States are those states that license and regulate the industrial and medical uses of radioactive material under agreements with the NRC.

In addition, the NRC deployed the National Source Tracking System in 2009. This is a secure, national registry that tracks the most sensitive radioactive materials licensed by the NRC or states from the time they are manufactured or imported through the time of their disposal, decay, or export. This tracking system enhances the agency's ability to detect and act upon inventory discrepancies, respond to emergencies, and verify the legitimate use and transfer of sources. It has also helped the NRC to locate and ensure the safety of radioactive materials after natural events such as hurricanes and tornadoes.

Recently, the Commission approved a new rule that will write many of these security measures into NRC's regulations. The new rule also incorporates lessons learned during implementation of the Orders and operating experience from inspections. One important new requirement is for licensees to implement recurring security training for everyone involved in ensuring the security of their facilities.

The NRC will work with GAO to identify and address any security concerns raised by the audit. But NRC remains confident that its program for securing and controlling radioactive materials is robust, appropriate and effective.