National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy www.nnsa.doe.gov

NEWS

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Contact: NNSA Public Affairs
(202) 586-7371

DOE/NNSA Cites Babcock & Wilcox Technical Services Y-12, LLC for Violations

WASHINGTON, DC – The Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration today issued a preliminary notice of violation to Babcock & Wilcox Technical Services Y-12, LLC (B&W Y-12) for nuclear safety violations at the Y-12 National Security Complex. B&W Y-12 operates the Y-12 plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, under contract to the National Nuclear Security Administration.

The notice cites a series of violations related to a fire on March 15, 2007, that resulted from a chemical reaction between dry uranium chips and air while the chips were being transferred to a storage location at Y-12. Violations include deficiencies in the training of the workers who were transferring the chips; the procedures for controlling material disassembly and handling; compliance with radiological control procedures; and the assessment processes B&W Y-12 used to evaluate and oversee the operation.

The fire was of short duration and self-extinguishing, and the building occupants evacuated the building in response to the smoke from the fire. One hundred and eleven workers received radiation doses due to inhalation of radioactive material as a result of the fire. Most of the workers received 10 millirem or less of exposure, which is roughly equal to a chest x-ray. Some of the workers received closer to 100 millirem of exposure, which is roughly equal to a brain CT scan. While their health will not be affected, any unnecessary worker exposure is unacceptable by NNSA standards. For comparison purposes, the Department of Energy allowable annual occupational radiation exposure limit is 5000 millirem.

The proposed civil penalty of $123,750 is based on the significance of the violations. In response to the event, B&W Y-12 identified and undertook a series of corrective actions to address the underlying causes and prevent recurrence. The proposed civil penalty reflects mitigation granted by NNSA in recognition of those actions.

The Price-Anderson Amendments Act of 1988 authorizes the Department of Energy to undertake regulatory actions against contractors for violations of its nuclear safety requirements. The enforcement program encourages departmental contractors to identify and correct nuclear safety deficiencies at an early stage, before they contribute to or result in more serious events.

Additional details on this and other enforcement actions are available at: www.hss.doe.gov/enforce.

Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a separately organized agency within the U.S. Department of Energy responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing; works to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction; provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion; and responds to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the United States and abroad. Visit www.nnsa.energy.gov for more information.

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