

Energy Department Cites Three Contractors for Nuclear Safety Violations

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Contractors Take Action to Ensure Safety Lessons are Implemented

WASHINGTON, DC The Department of Energy this week cited contractors at three Energy Department sites for violating nuclear safety requirements. The contractors are: Bechtel Hanford, Inc. at the Hanford Site; Kaiser Hill Company, LLC, management operator of the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site; and International Isotopes Idaho, Inc., a subcontractor at the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory. Proposed civil penalties totaling \$123,750 accompanied the Preliminary Notices of Violation issued to Bechtel Hanford and Kaiser Hill.

"The Department of Energy has established clear nuclear safety procedures, and we expect these procedures to be followed," said Dr. David Michaels, the Department of Energy's Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health. "Although not every violation of safety procedures results in harm to workers or the public, we demand that our contractors adhere to the rules, so that serious accidents can be prevented."

The Preliminary Notices of Violation citing the three contractors concern events that took place in 1999. The Department of Energy categorizes violations on a three-step scale on which Level I violations pose the greatest potential impact to worker or public safety and Level III the least.

Bechtel Hanford, Inc. Three Severity Level II violations - \$82,500

The citation to Bechtel Hanford resulted from the unplanned exposure of three workers to airborne radioactivity in June 1999 at the 105B Transfer Bay area of the department's Hanford Site in Washington. Workers unwrapped a highly contaminated filter press without utilizing appropriate engineering and administrative controls. This created an area with airborne radioactivity which was not adequately recognized, posted or controlled as required by safety procedures. Workers continued to periodically access the Transfer Bay for approximately 13 days without the respiratory protection that would be appropriate to the radiological hazard.

Both the contractor's review and the Department of Energy's independent investigation of the event identified significant deficiencies in radiological work planning and control. Although the event resulted in no measurable worker uptake of radioactive contamination, the department expressed its concern that the multiple breakdowns in the contractor's radiological work controls put workers at risk and could have resulted in significant exposures. The violation was classified as a Level II event.

The base civil penalty for these violations of \$165,000 was mitigated by half, based on Bechtel Hanford's response, including a thorough investigation and development of corrective actions that address program weaknesses as well as the specific causes of the event.

Kaiser Hill Company, LLC One Severity Level II Violation - \$41,250

Kaiser Hill was cited for a February 1999 event at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site outside Denver, Colo., that resulted in a worker performing decontamination and decommissioning activities receiving an unplanned, uncontrolled uptake of radioactive material – plutonium and americium – through a cut on his finger. The violation was classified as a Level II event. The estimated organ dose of 65 rem that resulted from the event exceeds the Energy Department's exposure limit of

50 rem. The department found that Kaiser Hill managers failed to recognize that there had been a change in the work scope of planned decontamination and decommissioning activities and, as a result, did not re-evaluate the hazards and apply appropriate controls. Additionally, managers failed to follow operating procedures by allowing a lone worker to dismantle a large glove box.

The Department of Energy has proposed a civil penalty in the amount of \$41,250. The department reduced the potential fine of \$55,000 in light of Kaiser Hill's evaluation and use of new engineered approaches to minimize workers' hands-on activities during decontamination and decommissioning activities.

**International Isotopes Idaho, Inc.
Severity Level III violation, No Civil Penalty**

International Isotopes Idaho, a for-profit private company acting as a subcontractor to the management and operations contractor of the Department of Energy's Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, was cited for deficiencies in work planning and work control. These deficiencies were evident in a July 1999 event when workers were replacing hot cell exhaust ventilation filters at Test Reactor Area Building 632. Specifically, the contractor failed to ensure, as required by the laboratory's procedures, that work activity documents were developed in a coordinated manner and failed to validate these documents before putting them into use. As a result of deficient operating documents, two maintenance workers were contaminated with radioactive material.

The potential health consequences of the radiation exposure to the two workers were minimal, and no fine was assessed. Rather, the department issued the Level III Preliminary Notice of Violation to emphasize the need for proper control of work-related activities and ensure effective corrective actions are taken.

The Preliminary Notices of Violation require each company to take appropriate and effective corrective actions. Bechtel Hanford, Inc. and Kaiser Hill Company, LLC have examined problems and taken all necessary corrective actions to prevent problems from recurring. International Isotopes Idaho, Inc.'s corrective action response is due by June 19, 2000.

The notices will become final in 30 days unless the companies provide sufficient justification and information to rebut the findings of the enforcement actions.

The Preliminary Notices of Violation are issued under the Price-Anderson Act, which allows the Department of Energy to fine contractors for safety violations. Copies of the violations are available on the Internet at: <http://www.eh.doe.gov/enforce>.

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