

# DOE Cites Argonne National Laboratory for Nuclear Safety Violations

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**WASHINGTON, DC** The Department of Energy (DOE) has cited the University of Chicago, operator of the Energy Department's Argonne National Laboratory in Argonne, Illinois, for violations of rules and procedures designed to assure nuclear safety under the Price-Anderson Amendments Act of 1988. Had the laboratory not been exempt from fines by the statute, the civil penalty associated with the violations would have been \$165,000.

The violations took place in October 2000 when there was an uncontrolled release of radon as workers were doing decontamination and decommissioning work at a former nuclear facility. As a result, seven workers received unplanned exposures to radioactive material. While the radiation doses were well below regulatory limits and do not portend current or future health impacts, DOE seeks to minimize any radiological exposure to workers.

A Preliminary Notice of Violation was issued by DOE's Office of Price Anderson Enforcement, and, consistent with the enforcement program's mission, focused on activities that could serve as precursors to more serious incidents. The Preliminary Notice of Violation consists of three parts. Specifically, the laboratory was cited for:

- Insufficient identification that on-site, subcontractor radiation safety personnel needed an improved understanding of the hazards associated with processing radioactive waste;
- Insufficient planning, review, and conduct work activities involving neutralizing acids in a mixed waste (radioactive and hazardous) solution to minimize exposure potential; and
- Inefficient employment of effective administrative controls to keep radiation exposures as low as reasonably achievable.

DOE determined that the laboratory would not receive mitigation of the proposed civil penalty.

Mitigation can be given in cases where a DOE contractor acts to report an event or takes effective corrective actions.

In making this decision, DOE cited the University of Chicago's failure to resolve repeated concerns affecting nuclear work and ensuring effective management assessments of its nuclear activities.

In response to the event, Argonne has developed a comprehensive plan which addresses the deficiencies and implemented 63 corrective actions in areas ranging from hazards identification, training and workplace planning to enhancing the practice of maintaining radiation exposure to "as low as reasonably achievable." In addition, the laboratory is

implementing a structured program of management assessments expected to be complete by October 31, 2001.

The Price-Anderson Amendments Act of 1988 requires DOE to undertake regulatory enforcement actions against contractors for violations of DOE's nuclear safety requirement. This enforcement program is designed to impose substantial penalties for what are generally considered minor events to forestall a more serious event from occurring.

Additional details can be found on the Internet at <http://www.eh.doe.gov/enforce>.

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