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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ENERGY DEPARTMENT ACTS TO BOOST SAFETY AT ROCKY FLATS SITE
Contractors Fined for Safety Violations

The Department of Energy has fined two private sector companies at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site in Golden, CO, for violations of nuclear safety requirements designed to protect workers from unplanned exposures to radiation.

"This action exemplifies the Clinton administration's commitment to safety. When other tools don't work, we need strong enforcement to protect safety and health of workers at DOE sites. And we know that our workers support these actions," said Secretary of Energy Hazel R. O'Leary.

DOE levied the fines on the Kaiser-Hill Company, L.L.C. of Golden, and Safe Sites of Colorado, a subcontractor to Kaiser-Hill. The fines were issued under authority recently made available through the Price-Anderson Act Amendments. That law, for the first-time, gave DOE authority to take enforcement actions against contractors who violate nuclear safety rules. Issuance of the fines of \$37,500 for each firm follows a comprehensive investigation by DOE's Office of Enforcement and Investigation. The fines cannot be reimbursed to the contractors by the federal government.

"This action confirms the ability of the department and its field offices to hold contractors accountable for safety performance," said Dr. Tara O'Toole, DOE Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health, whose office oversees the enforcement program. She specifically commended the federal staff at the Rocky Flats Field Office "who initially called these problems to our attention and helped us track them through the investigation."

DOE Rocky Flats manager Jessie Roberson added that "this action demonstrates that the DOE is very serious about overseeing contractors and holding those contractors accountable for the work they perform." The department cited the companies for two specific violations that took place in March and April 1996, respectively. "While neither incident involved worker exposures over current regulatory limits, we are concerned that the contractors do not have adequate systems in place to prevent more serious accidents in the future," Dr. O'Toole added.

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The first incident involved an unexpected release of radioactive material while workers were venting drums containing transuranic waste. Workers continued to work in the area even after it was known that contamination had exceeded safe levels and that they were at risk of receiving significant, unplanned exposure. In addition, the department found that the workplace atmosphere was not properly monitored and that workers' protective clothing was not increased as required.

Similar violations occurred in April when five workers were unexpectedly contaminated with varying levels of plutonium while placing plutonium-contaminated waste into plastic bags and one of the bags broke. While the Plutonium uptakes for one worker was 8 percent of the DOE annual dose limit, it was still viewed as unnecessary and therefore subject to enforcement action.

In determining the fine, DOE considered the actual or potential exposure to workers, compliance with radiological work controls, any prior notice of the problem and the possibility of a pattern of related violations. Although the contractor management committed to improve control of work at the facility subsequent to these events, the department issued the fines to ensure that:

- Management expectations are established, effectively communicated and followed by the workforce.
- Problems are promptly identified and corrected.
- Facility level managers and supervisors maintain appropriate command and control of hazardous activities.

Based on this action, each firm is required to respond and document specific actions taken and any additional actions planned to prevent recurrence. DOE will review the responses and determine whether further action is necessary to ensure compliance with nuclear safety requirements.

Copies of the Preliminary Notice of Violation is available from the DOE Office of Enforcement and Investigation at 301/903-0100.

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