

INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the safety of nuclear weapons is primarily a joint responsibility of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the Department of Defense (DOD). NNSA has the responsibility for stewardship and maintenance of nuclear weapons used for the country's defense. The DOD has control of the weapons for the major part of their life cycle following manufacture.

Both agencies are prepared to respond to any accident involving U.S. nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. Detailed accident response plans and procedures have been developed and are practiced on a regular basis. Accidents occurring in the United States fall under the guidance of the Federal Radiological Emergency Response Plan, which covers any peacetime radiological emergency that has actual, potential, or perceived radiological consequences that could require a response by the federal government. The Plan defines the roles of 17 federal agencies in response to radiological accidents.

Other key federal agencies participating in accident response are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Transportation Safety Board (if an accident involves a nuclear materials shipment).



DOE NNSA Accident Response

DOE RESPONSE TO A NUCLEAR WEAPON ACCIDENT

Notification of an accident involving nuclear weapons or nuclear materials in NNSA custody is transmitted following emergency response procedures through normal communication channels.

The notification process moves up to NNSA/DOE Headquarters, which could authorize deployment of a regional Radiological Assistance Program (RAP) team, the Accident Response Group (ARG), and other NNSA assets to an accident site.

The RAP team is NNSA's primary accident response element and is comprised of health physicists and support personnel with a primary mission to perform radiological assessment and monitoring at an accident. It is usually the first NNSA team to deploy to the scene of an accident or incident.

The ARG response element is managed out of NNSA Albuquerque and is comprised of scientists, technical specialists, crisis managers, and equipment ready for short-notice dispatch to the scene of a nuclear accident. ARG

response is coordinated through the DOE Joint Nuclear Accident Coordinating Center (JNACC).

The ARG first deploys an advance team—consisting of an Energy Senior Official, Senior Scientific Advisors, Weapon Recovery Director, Logistics Coordinator, Hazards Assessment Director, and Public Affairs Officer—to the scene usually within a few hours after notification. The ARG advance team determines the type and number of personnel required and the equipment needed for the response. The RAP team provides radiological assessment and other information to the ARG. After this briefing the RAP team works hand and hand with the ARG.

NNSA is the Lead Federal Agency in an incident or accident involving nuclear weapons or materials in NNSA custody and coordinates all federal actions at the scene of an accident. A weapons accident scene is designated a National Defense Area (NDA) and a guarded perimeter is set up around the site to prevent access by unauthorized persons for security and safety reasons. When all classified materials and debris have been cleared from the site, control is returned to state authorities.

A Joint Information Center (JIC) will be established near the scene but outside the NDA. Public affairs officers from NNSA/DOE, FEMA, and other federal, state, and local agencies as appropriate will staff it. The JIC is the single point for release of information to the news media and public concerning all aspects of accident response.

For Further Information Contact:

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