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NRC ISSUES AN ORDER TO RADIOGRAPHY COMPANY FOR INADEQUATE SAFETY PRACTICES

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a confirmatory order to Mistras Holding Group documenting the company's commitments to improve safety practices in radiography work. Mistras Holding Group, which operates from multiple locations throughout the country including Illinois and Pennsylvania, also does business as CONAM Inspection and Engineering Services Quality Services Laboratories, Inc.

The NRC's confirmatory order makes the company's commitments into conditions of its license. If these conditions are not met, the company's NRC license may be terminated; criminal or civil charges may be brought against the company; and fines may be levied.

In January 2007, CONAM reported to the NRC that a radiographer may have been overexposed to radiation while performing industrial radiography at a Sunoco refinery in Philadelphia, Penn. Industrial radiography involves the use of a sealed radiation source to produce x-ray-like images.

The NRC looked into the circumstances around the event. Inspectors identified five apparent violations, such as the radiographer's failure to secure the sealed source with radioactive material in the shielded position; failure to wear a radiation alarm at all times; failure to stop radiography when a pocket radiation measuring device showed off-the-scale radiation levels; and failure to make sure that the radiation safety officer named in the NRC license performed the intended function. A subsequent NRC investigation showed that most of the apparent violations were willful or deliberate.

Even though the radiographer was exposed to radiation as a result of the event, the radiation dose received was not in excess of regulatory limits and is not expected to cause adverse health effects. The company took corrective actions following the event, such as removing the radiographer from radiography work; implementing new procedures to verify that the radiation source is properly retracted into a shielded position; and briefing all employees at the Pennsylvania facility on the circumstances and causes of the event.

The NRC and CONAM addressed the apparent violations through an alternative dispute resolution process which involves the use of mediation to reach a conclusion acceptable to both parties.

As part of the agreement reached by the NRC and the company, CONAM committed to: increasing the number of audits of its radiographers by 25 percent; revising its audit procedures to address the conduct of audits and documentation of results; disseminating lessons learned through an online training program; creating a safety hotline for radiographers to report safety concerns; and conducting surveys of safety consciousness in the company.

The confirmatory order can be accessed at: <http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/regulatory/enforcement/current.html>. Other documents are available through the NRC RIII Office of Public Affairs and at the NRC web site: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

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