



NRC NEWS

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION OF URANIUM ONE USA URANIUM RECOVERY FACILITY IN WYOMING

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission began a special inspection today at the Uranium One Irigaray and Christensen Ranch in situ uranium recovery facility located near Casper, Wyo.

On October 2, two operators were working at the facility, when an alarm sounded and the yellowcake dryer automatically shut down. Operators then noticed airborne yellowcake uranium outside the dryer enclosure within the process building.

In situ recovery facilities recover uranium from ores using a chemical injection process to remove the uranium. The uranium is then separated from the solution, concentrated, and dried to form yellowcake.

An NRC inspector is traveling to the site to evaluate the incident and corrective actions underway. It appears that a seal on the dryer may have broken, causing the yellowcake powder to escape. Current information indicates there were no major safety impacts or release to the environment as the dryer is housed inside a pressurized sealed room within a building. The licensee is in the process of cleaning up the uranium within the facility.

The NRC is conducting a special inspection to determine if the workers received any exposure to the yellowcake. The site ceased uranium recovery operations in 2000 and was restarted in January. The special inspection will ensure that the licensee takes appropriate corrective actions after reviewing the incident.

The Irigaray and Christensen Ranch facility is operated by Uranium One USA Inc. After completing onsite preoperational inspections in December 2010, NRC notified Uranium One on Dec. 17, 2010, that it had fulfilled the necessary requirements to begin operations. The facility is authorized to produce up to 2.5 million pounds of uranium oxide, or yellowcake, annually.

The NRC inspectors will issue a publicly available inspection report on their findings within 45 days of the end of the inspection.

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