

# DOE Fines Two Idaho Contractors for Safety Violations

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**WASHINGTON, DC** The Department of Energy (DOE) has fined two contractors at the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) for violations of nuclear safety rules that led to low-level radiation exposures to six workers in September 1997. DOE levied a civil penalty of \$125,000 on Lockheed Martin Idaho Technologies Co. (LMITCO) as the prime DOE contractor at the site. DOE issued a separate fine of \$25,000 to MAC Isotopes, LLC, a privatized contractor using INEEL facilities and services. Both companies are based in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

The violations took place when workers for LMITCO and MAC Isotopes -- a firm engaged in the commercial production of radioisotopes for medical and industrial uses -- were repairing equipment that was contaminated with "hot" or highly radioactive material. Workers removed a plastic cover that had become highly contaminated with the radioactive material. When the cover was moved for disposal, the radioactive europium powder spread and contaminated the entire facility. Exposures to six workers were about 10 millirem each, compared to a maximum annual limit of 5,000 millirem at all DOE sites. The contractor closed the building for three weeks to clear it of contamination.

"While worker exposures were relatively low, what concerns us more is that the same problems involving management of basic radiological work planning and control also caused unnecessary worker exposures at INEEL in 1996," said Peter N. Brush, the department's Acting Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health. "Had LMITCO properly fixed the problems identified at the time, this contamination could have been avoided."

The DOE investigation determined that the incident resulted from the contractors' multiple failures to follow proper work control procedures and adequately train radiation safety personnel. For example:

- LMITCO technical staff allowed work planning and work control documents for the repair job to describe a more common and more extensive procedure than the one actually conducted. Further, LMITCO radiation safety staff were unaware of how the radioactive material involved would behave during the repair process.
- To minimize down time, MAC Isotopes personnel did not prepare accurate or adequate repair work documents. MAC Isotopes was knowledgeable of the properties of the radioactive material involved but failed to disseminate that information to its own personnel and LMITCO safety staff.

The recommended civil penalty of \$125,000 against LMITCO involves five separate violations of \$25,000 each. No mitigation of the penalty against LMITCO was provided, as deficiencies were not identified by LMITCO beforehand and were a continuation of broader radiological control deficiencies identified in previous enforcement issues. The recommended penalty of \$25,000 for MAC Isotopes involves two violations of \$12,500 each. MAC Isotopes received 50 percent mitigation of the penalty, due to the effective corrective actions it has implemented specific to the involved facility.

LMITCO supplies technical support staff to MAC Isotopes and is responsible for ensuring that subcontractors follow all applicable radiological and quality assurance procedures. This action represents the first enforcement action against a private contractor conducting commercial activities on a DOE site. MAC Isotopes is currently known as International Isotopes Idaho Inc.

Each Preliminary Notice of Violation will become final in 30 days unless the violations are denied with sufficient justification. Additional information on these actions and other aspects of the enforcement program are available via the Internet at <http://tis-nt.eh.doe.gov/enforce/>.

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