



Los Alamos responds to radiological incident

August 27, 2012

The Laboratory is investigating the inadvertent spread of Technetium 99 by employees and contractors at the Lujan Neutron Scattering Center

August 27, 2012—The Laboratory is investigating the inadvertent spread of Technetium 99 by employees and contractors at the Lujan Neutron Scattering Center at the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center (LANSCE), a multidisciplinary accelerator facility used for both civilian and national security research. The Laboratory has determined that about a dozen people came into contact with the material, and some tracked small amounts of Technetium 99 off-site. The contamination poses no danger to the public. The type of radiation involved in this case is beta radiation, which comes from low-power, fast-moving electrons that can travel through several feet of air, but are generally stopped by clothing and skin. Beta emitters occur naturally in the environment, and this incident involved approximately the same radiation levels that occur naturally in bricks or stone flooring in the Southwest. Decontamination involves washing with soap and water. So far, based on direct measurements, no exposures to Lab workers or the public pose a health risk.

The Laboratory and Department of Energy RAP teams (Radiological Assistance Program) have been working to survey, assess, and where needed, decontaminate all affected people and property. The teams will ensure that all off-site contamination has been appropriately characterized and remediated.

Some operations at the Lujan Center will be placed on temporary hold until facility cleanup can be completed.

The Laboratory considers all issues of unintended radiological contamination to be serious. The Laboratory will continue to exercise due diligence in all operations involving nuclear materials, and this type of incident warrants our special attention in order to prevent a future occurrence.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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