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Subject: Yellow Alert: Work Controls Affected by Ambiguous Terms

Title: Yellow Alert- Work Controls Affected by Ambiguous Terms

Date: March 16, 2000 Identifier: 2000-NV-NTSBN-004

Lessons Learned Statement: Improve communications by addressing potentially ambiguous esoteric terms.

Discussion of Activities: In two unrelated incidents, warnings were misconstrued by workers. In the first incident, an electrician opened an electrical panel to read a meter without receiving approval to do so from the facility owner even though the panel lid had a warning label against **performing any work on this equipment.** During the second incident at a separate site, a Radiological Control Technician (RCT) directed those present at a job briefing not to **cut** a platform until it had been surveyed by a RCT. An ironworker sawed a section of the platform. Once a RCT discovered the platform was cut, work was stopped.

Analysis: The electrician was directed to read a meter. The meter was located inside an electrical panel. The panel lid had a warning label against **performing any work on this equipment** unless the facility owner was first contacted. The electrician did not consider reading the meter as **work,** but rather as an observation since nothing inside the panel would be altered from the activity. A survey had been previously performed on the platform, but the results were inconclusive because of high background radiation. In order to accurately survey the platform, it was necessary to move it to an area with lower background radiation. In order to move the platform, it was necessary to first remove some components of the platform that contained asbestos. The ironworker was present when the RCT said not to **cut** the platform. The ironworker understood the term **cut** to mean flame cutting, not sawing. **Cutting** typically means flame cutting for that craft.

In each case, the esoteric terms used to communicate the status and requirements of the work to be conducted were misconstrued. This led to activities being conducted before approval was secured from the proper authority. These were both considered to be potential violations of the Price Anderson Amendment Act (PAAA).

Recommended Actions: Include operational definitions of potentially ambiguous or confusing esoteric terms during briefings and other work direction communications. In addition, address situations of this nature as part of a formal PAAA review process and a formal root cause analysis investigation. These types of reviews and investigations are necessary to ensure that these types of situations do not recur.

Priority Descriptor: Yellow

Work/Function: Facility Maintenance, Radiological

BN Functional Categories: N/A

Hazard: Loss of process control, potential radiological contamination

ISM Core Function: Define the scope of work

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