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## **Environment Department Fines Company \$16,500 For Misplacing Low Level Radioactive Sources That Caused Shutdown Of State Fairgrounds In November**

(Santa Fe, NM) – The New Mexico Environment Department fined a medical consulting group \$16,500 this week for violating state regulations when radioactive materials it owned were placed near a car at the State Fairgrounds on Nov. 18. The discovery of the materials forced the closure of the fairgrounds.

A radiation safety officer for RIO Grande Radiological Physics Group, LLC, told the Environment Department on Nov. 20 that he left the two-inch cylindrical shaped lead containers -- used to calibrate equipment in hospitals -- on a wall outside the front door of his residence in Albuquerque the night of Nov. 17. The man's neighbor found and took the containers, which he planned to return to the owner. The neighbor, who went to the state fairgrounds on Nov. 18, was sorting through trash and other items in his car and left the materials beside the vehicle.

"Our goal is to protect public health and the environment," said Environment Secretary Ron Curry. "While the radiation in these sources did not pose a significant risk, the Environment Department must take action to make sure safety procedures are followed and health protected."

The company violated New Mexico Radiation Protection Regulations for failing to maintain proper control of its radioactive materials. The level of radiation in the containers, which contained cobalt-57 and cesium-137, was low and caused no significant exposure to radiation. The radioactivity in the containers, which was old and no longer useful to hospitals, was sealed in an epoxy resin within the container.

Police evacuated the fairgrounds after discovering the materials. The U.S. Department of Energy took the materials to Sandia National Laboratories for testing after the sources were discovered. The containers were taken to the NMED offices in Albuquerque and later given back to the owner. RIO Grande has radioactive materials the company uses in consulting work with hospitals and doctor's offices around the state. The company has the right to appeal the Environment Department's administrative compliance order and civil penalty of \$16,500.

For more information contact Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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