

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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June 19, 2008

Dr. James Turner  
Acting Director  
National Institute of Standards and Technology  
100 Bureau Drive, Stop 1070  
Gaithersburg, MD 20899-1070

Dear Dr. Turner,

We are writing this letter to express our concern over the accidental release of plutonium at NIST's Boulder Laboratory on June, 9. We are relieved to learn there were no immediate injuries due to the incident, however we are troubled by changing information, that health and safety protocols were not strictly followed, and that clear and accurate information regarding this incident is still not available.

NIST congressional affairs staff and other agency personnel have updated Science and Technology Committee staff with new information on the incident as it is available. We are concerned that the scope of the incident has changed over the course of a week, from one where the contamination was contained and procedures followed, to one where contamination escaped the lab and procedures were not followed. NIST researchers are renowned for their exemplary scientific work. It is disappointing to learn that this leadership does not appear to extend to laboratory health and safety issues.

As we continue to oversee this incident, we request that NIST make available to Committee staff the following information:

- Copies of the radiation and chemical safety protocols followed by NIST employees, and verification of the status of training and refresher training for all current employees;
- Information regarding how NIST's radioactive substance handling and clean up protocols align with those followed by the Department of Energy (DOE) and Los Alamos National Laboratory;
- A summary of NIST environmental, health, and safety (EHS) incident reports for the past year, focusing specifically on chemical EHS incidents;
- Copies of notices sent to NIST employees regarding the incident;
- Copies of correspondences with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the DOE;

- Copies of communications with Boulder, Colorado city officials and the appropriate county and state officials;
- Copies of any external safety audits done for NIST laboratories;
- And the completed reports on the incident by NIST's review team and the Independent Review Board.

NIST researchers handle radioactive substances and other, equally dangerous chemicals. Given both the real hazards of these materials, and the public's perception of danger, we want assurances that NIST personnel are taking all possible precautions when handling hazardous substances and that a culture of safety is evident and respected at all levels of NIST.

The Committee looks forward to receiving a full report of this incident in as timely a manner as possible.

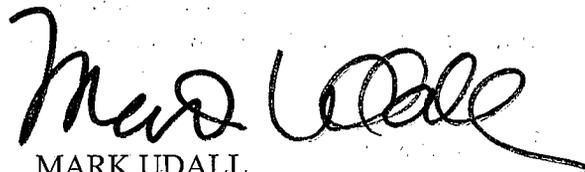
Sincerely,



BART GORDON  
Chairman  
Committee on Science & Technology



DAVID WU  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Technology & Innovation



MARK UDALL  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Space & Aeronautics