



Media statement

30 August 2010

Correcting the record – xenon measurements in Melbourne

A recent media report has made false and alarmist claims about measurements of xenon gas in Melbourne.

The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) produces radioisotopes which are used in various imaging applications in hospitals around Australia. All production carried out at ANSTO is done within strict guidelines of safety and licences which are administered by the regulator ARPANSA.

As part of the production of these life saving products, and common to any chemical manufacturing process, there is a small amount of allowable discharge. This is done under licence and is strictly monitored.

Far from being poisonous, xenon gas detected at an ultra-sensitive International Monitoring System (IMS) site in Melbourne was around one-millionth the amount of radiation detected in the human body. Claims of a cover up are demonstrably false. The independent regulator, ARPANSA has confirmed that ANSTO reported these emissions to them as per usual procedure and that there were no public health implications.

ANSTO works with authorities, including staff at the IMS site in Melbourne, to monitor atmospheric radioactivity levels. This information provides vital information to the international community about international weapons testing.

Between November 2008 and January 2009, some of the radio-xenon observed at the IMS came from ANSTO's radiopharmaceutical production facility in Sydney during trial runs of ANSTO's new molybdenum-99 production plant.

As expected and planned for, the releases were recorded at extremely low levels and much lower than daily exposures from natural sources of radiation.

The dose to the local community from all ANSTO operations is very low and strictly monitored. It is less than 0.005 millisieverts per year compared to natural background radiation of about 1.5 millisieverts per year. Emissions of xenon-133 represent a very small contributor to this overall dose.

ANSTO has published real time data for radiation monitoring on its public website since mid 2008. ANSTO plays an important role in the nuclear medicine industry supplying 600,000 patient doses of radiopharmaceuticals to Australians each year.

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For more information please contact ANSTO (02) 9717 9208 or 0457 505 438.