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Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

Media release

(Please see footnotes for updated information)

6 May 2010

ANSTO responds to *Lateline* safety claims

ANSTO categorically rejects claims of safety problems at the radiopharmaceutical production facility at its Lucas Heights campus aired in a segment on ABC Television's *Lateline* last night.

ANSTO seeks to continuously strengthen and improve its safety culture and encourages all staff to raise concerns about workplace safety¹.

ANSTO employee, Mr David Reid made a false claim on *Lateline* of a 'massive radiation dose' to a worker as a result of a 2008 incident. A series of internal investigations by ANSTO and one by the independent nuclear safety regulator, ARPANSA, has clearly demonstrated this was not the case.

The *Lateline* program also made unsupported claims that an employee had an elevated white blood cell count as a result of this incident. This claim was not raised in the interview with ANSTO². There is no known association between a high white blood-cell count and exposure to radiation. The employee presented at the ANSTO Medical Centre 12 months after the incident. The professional medical advice he received was that his condition was related to an infection he picked up on an overseas holiday.

Mr Reid has worked as an operator at ANSTO and has no qualifications in radiation or medical science. His experience is as an elected occupational health and safety staff representative. His claims about employee exposure are incorrect.

The incident referred to occurred in August 2008. This occurred in the radiopharmaceutical production facility which is separate to the OPAL reactor. The incident was reported and investigated at the time. There were no radiation exposures to employees outside normal occupational levels.

Mr Reid's first complaint occurred in April 2009. ARI³ management immediately initiated an investigation. Two weeks later Mr Reid raised the same complaint at an ANSTO safety meeting acknowledging the ARI investigation was underway. A subsequent investigation by ANSTO management followed.

In July 2009, Mr Reid was not satisfied and again raised concerns. This led to a major internal investigation ordered by the CEO. The investigation was completed in September and concluded there were no abnormal radiation exposures to staff. However, legitimate concerns about training and procedures in the medical isotope production facility were raised and have since been addressed.

In October 2009, ARPANSA initiated an investigation following an approach from Mr Reid. This was completed in January 2010 and substantially agreed with ANSTO's four internal investigations. ARPANSA concluded there was no cover up, and no significant radiological event.

All of ARPANSA's recommendations have been implemented or are substantially complete. The reports reflect the importance of attending to management issues that were identified in the investigations⁴.

As ANSTO has repeatedly noted, the public comments by Mr Reid in relation to worker dose and cover-up are not consistent with findings by the nuclear safety regulator ARPANSA and are rejected by ANSTO⁵.

¹ ANSTO believes it has a strong safety culture but acknowledges that continuous improvement is essential to ensure this.

² This claim was not raised during the ANSTO interview with *Lateline*.

³ ARI is ANSTO's radiopharmaceutical production division

⁴ ANSTO acknowledges that to ensure a consistently strong safety culture, management and staff must play an active role in ensuring this.

⁵ ANSTO is emphatic on this point.

ANSTO is disappointed that Mr Reid has not accepted the findings of five investigations including one by the independent nuclear safety regulator and that he continues to make allegations that no action has taken place.

Further corrections:

- Mr Reid is currently suspended for an unrelated behavioural matter originating from allegations he assaulted another employee. ANSTO continues to strongly reject any suggestion that the suspension was related to him raising safety concerns⁶.
- All employees who have raised health concerns have always been offered support, contrary to suggestions on *Lateline*. All employees are routinely provided with feedback on radiation dose reports in the workplace, including all employees involved in this incident.
- ANSTO is proud of a safety culture that encourages all employees to raise any concerns about safety through all available channels. Employees actively do this and it supports ANSTO in achieving the highest possible levels of safety awareness and practice.
- Over the last three years, there have been no incidents where a worker at ANSTO has received a radiation dose above regulatory limits or ANSTO's stricter self-imposed limits⁷.

Please find further existing public record information here:

http://www.ansto.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/46101/Correcting_the_record.pdf

http://www.ansto.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0013/44221/radioactive_spill_claim_info.pdf

For more information please contact ANSTO (02) 9717 9041 or 0419 2415 87.

This release has been updated following discussions with appropriate stakeholders. The changes are notated with explanatory footnotes to ensure transparency.

⁶ A reference to specific personnel records has been removed.

⁷ The last occasion that a worker's dose limit was exceeded was April 2007.

http://www.ansto.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/10111/radiopharmincident_April.pdf