

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2009-10
21 October 2009

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Health and Safety Standards

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard 21 October 2009, E8)

QUESTION No.: SI-17

Senator LUDLAM – I understand that an audit arising from an event that took place in August 2008 found that there were deficiencies and opportunities for improvement in the safety management issues at ARI. Can you confirm that for us?

Dr Adrian Paterson – An audit was undertaken and there was a finding that we could improve the reporting of the incident management.

Senator LUDLAM- we will go to that in a moment I just want to have you talk through the details of the incident in question. My understanding is that it involved a vial of molybdenum-99 being dislodged from manipulator grips, presumably in one of the hot cells in the plant, which was then left where it had dropped and remained unreported for several hours exposing workers to radiation. Is that a correct characterisation of the incident?

Senator LUDLAM—I am not after the wording—is that an approximate description of the incident?

Dr Adrian Paterson—I think ‘several hours’ would be something that I would have to go back and take on notice. There was a period of time where that vial was dropped and it was not timeously reported.

Senator LUDLAM—My understanding is that it was roughly three hours. But if your understanding is different, then if you could take that on notice for us, I would appreciate that. The audit found that proper processes were not followed: evacuation of the area did not occur, timely communication and event reporting, thorough investigation and follow-up did not occur. Is that your understanding also?

Dr Adrian Paterson—I think that that is a fair summary.

ANSWER

The dislodgement of the vial of molybdenum-99 was notified to the Shift Supervisor and Production Manager approximately one hour after it happened. A full review of the radiation records for the workers in the facility at the time indicates dose levels in the range of those expected from normal production activities. No dose exceeded ANSTO’s internal investigation levels for daily doses.