

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012
19 October 2011

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

TOPIC: BUILDINGS 23A AND 23B

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 19 October 2011, page 23).

QUESTION No.: SI-20

Senator LUDLAM: Can you briefly sketch for us what goes on in building 23 A and B?

Dr Paterson: Building 23 A and B constitute, among some other minor activities, the core of our radiopharmaceutical production activities at ANSTO.

Senator LUDLAM: Have there been any reported incidents of concern in either of those two buildings in the last three months?

Dr Paterson: I am not sure of the meaning of 'incidents of concern'. There are a number of incident reports that take place on an ongoing basis, as I have indicated to this committee. We encourage our staff to report all incidents, no matter what level of radiological contamination, for example, is involved. During the last period of time, staff have continued to report radiological contamination on an ongoing basis. We continue to do our health physics surveys of the area and we have continued to monitor those reports at a high level, as we were requested to by the ministerial review panel. I have not seen in the reports provided to me any matters that would warrant a change in the practices or the standard approaches that we take.

Senator LUDLAM: Could you provide us, perhaps on notice, with a summary of those reports of radiological contamination? You have made it sound as though they are fairly frequent. Is that the case?

Dr Paterson: Our target for contamination is to eliminate contamination incidents completely.

Senator LUDLAM: How many reports of radiological contamination do you get in an average month?

Dr Paterson: In a typical month we would be talking about between three and perhaps 10, if there had been a significant number in relation to particular production activities. For example, if there is contamination in one area it may affect more than one worker at different times. We can provide the summary you request.

Senator LUDLAM: I would appreciate that. Perhaps you could go back over the past three months and just hit with a highlighter pen anything that is relevant to buildings 23 A and B, if you would.

Dr Paterson: We will happily do that.

ANSWER

There have been no reports of significant contamination events in Buildings 23A and 23B in the last three months. An important part of ANSTO's safety management system is the capturing of information on all safety-related events including 'near hits' or events which did not have a safety consequence. In the last three months, ANSTO has received the following reports of these types of radiological contamination events in Buildings 23A and 23B:

- On nine occasions, trace levels of contamination were detected on personal protective equipment. In none of these instances did staff make physical contact with contamination.
- On nine other occasions, localised low-level contamination was identified within the work area. Remedial action was taken immediately upon detection. Additional monitoring was put in place.

While the events were subject to appropriate investigation and follow-up, there were no adverse radiological consequences as a result of the events. Nor was there the potential for such an outcome.

One of the key objectives for ANSTO is to implement best practice in safety and environmental management. ANSTO does not accept any standard less than zero-harm to people. To this end, we have strengthened management structures with a view to entrenching the culture of shared safety responsibility. The above events are proactively reported by staff in the context of a “blame free” improvement process. Events are stratified to ensure proper trend analysis, review and investigation to strengthen the implementation of safety improvements. An emphasis on the reporting of near hits is an essential component of a robust safety culture and key driver for continuous safety improvement. During 2010-11 there was a focus on increased event reporting, focussed investigations and completion of arising actions. This resulted in a 63 per cent improvement in reporting of events. Lost shift injuries dropped by 65 per cent over the same period.

Further information on our improvement processes is provided in ANSTO’s response to the Ministerial Review of Current Health and Safety Arrangements at ANSTO Health tabled in the Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing on 19 October 2011.

(http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/economics_ctte/estimates/sup_1112/taled_docs/Doc3B11_4101AttachmentCReviewofCurrentHealthandSafety.pdf)