

NEWS BRIEFS

Nordion's Main Medical Radionuclide Reactor Shuts Down

Nordion International of Kanata, Canada, the sole source of molybdenum-99 (^{99}Mo) for the United States, shut down its primary medical radionuclide-producing reactor on January 12, 1991. According to the company, the NRU reactor was shut down due to "airborne contamination in the reactor building."

While there were no supplies immediately available on January 12, Nordion's backup reactor, the NRX, was started up and at full power by the end of January 13. According to Iain C. Trevena, PhD, vice president of Nordion's isotope products division, "By January 20, Nordion was... meeting all customer requirements for the major nuclear medicine isotopes."

Captain William H. Briner (USPHS, ret.) associate professor of radiology, director of the radiopharmacy and nuclear medicine laboratory, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina, acknowledges Nordion's efforts to minimize supply disruptions, but he also expresses concerns over the lack of a secondary supplier for these isotopes. He says that this incident could have had "potentially catastrophic consequences on nuclear medicine's ability to continue its current pursuits. Fortunately, the Canadians had planned for the contingency of a shutdown and had the backup reactor available." He adds, however, that "we are still perilously close to a critical situation, having only one supplier of molybdenum-99."

According to Richard A. Holmes, MD, immediate past president of The Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM), professor of medicine, radiology, and nuclear engineering, chief of nuclear medicine, University of Missouri

Hospitals and Clinics, chief of nuclear medicine, Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital, Columbia, Missouri, the SNM is seeking to work with industry and the Department of Energy to facilitate the development of a secondary source of reactor-produced radionuclides, particularly ^{99}Mo . He says, "Because it is a critical need for all of nuclear medicine, the Society should really be involved. Alternative sites must be developed immediately if we are to avoid the problem that happened to Nordion." ■

SNM to Hold Administrators' Day Program

The Society of Nuclear Medicine's (SNM) Scientific Program Committee will present an Administrators' Day Program, featuring information sessions and exhibition viewing, during the SNM's 38th Annual Meeting, to be held June 11-14, 1991 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

SNM President Naomi P. Alazraki, MD, co-director of the division of nuclear medicine, Emory University Hospital, chief of nuclear medicine at the VA Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia, says, "The idea behind the Administrators' Day Program is to provide incentive for hospital radiology and nuclear medicine administrators to attend the SNM's annual meeting so they can get exposure to the concerns, needs, and problems that are particular to nuclear medicine." She adds that because over 100 commercial exhibitors will be showing the latest nuclear medicine equipment and products, "it would be particularly valuable for any administrator who is going to be making any large purchase of nuclear medicine equipment in the near future."

The Program is designed "to pro-

vide a forum for discussion of the administrative aspects of nuclear medicine — regulatory agency problems, reimbursement problems, and the expectations of the field from the administrators' standpoint, which is related to the point of view of health care," notes Dr. Alazraki.

SNM past president Barbara Y. Croft, PhD, associate professor of radiology, University of Virginia Hospital, Charlottesville, who headed the committee that created the program, says, "We hope to develop this into a focus for administrators at the annual meeting and to help them organize their priorities for high tech expenditures."

The Program, which is scheduled for Wednesday, June 12, includes the following presentations: Ken Kasses, PhD, senior vice president at Du Pont Merck Pharmaceutical Company, North Billerica, Massachusetts, will discuss industrial policy on health care and its financing; Dr. Alazraki will present a view of the future of nuclear medicine; Jeff Collmann, PhD, administrative director, biomedical imaging center, University of Tennessee Medical Center, Knoxville, will describe the planning and financing of a PET center; William C. Eckelman, PhD, vice president, division of diagnostic drug discovery, Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceutical Research Institute, New Brunswick, New Jersey, will discuss clinical and budget implications for new and established radiopharmaceuticals; and Jonathan M. Links, PhD, associate professor, environmental health sciences, The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Baltimore, Maryland, will present clinical and budget implications of new and established nuclear medicine instrumentation.

SNM plans to present an Administrators' Day Program each year as part of the annual meeting program. ■

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Geologic Study Supports Suitability of Yucca Mountain Site

Two Utah researchers who have analyzed mineral deposits at Yucca Mountain, Nevada — the federal government's proposed repository site for the nation's high-level radioactive waste (HLRW) — maintain that the region has not been affected by rising groundwater for more than 300,000 years, thus suggesting that the mountain cannot be disqualified as a potential HLRW site based on groundwater considerations. This position disputes the opinions of repository opponents, who contend that the emplacement of HLRW into the mountain would eventually pollute the underground water table and precipitate an ecological catastrophe. Thure E. Cerling, PhD, professor of geology, and Jay Quade, PhD, research associate, department of geology and geophysics, College of Mines and Earth Sciences, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, reported their findings in the December 14, 1990 issue of *Science*.

While previous federally funded studies at Yucca Mountain had also asserted that groundwater would not likely flood the proposed underground waste repository, critics of the government's plan to construct the site point to the existence of a network of carbonate and silica fillings — a mineral deposit known to be usually formed by water processes — found along trenches dug across faults on the mountain. They claim that these minerals were deposited as recently as 12,000 years ago during the last Ice Age, when groundwater rose to a level that would fill the proposed nuclear waste repository.

The Utah researchers, however, dispute that contention and maintain that the carbonate minerals were deposited

there thousands of years before the last Ice Age. Based on the geologic composition of the fracture carbonates, the researchers wrote that "the carbonates . . . likely formed in the presence of vegetation and rainfall typical of a glacial climate. . . The regional water table therefore remained below the level [where] the carbonates and silica precipitated [for] at least the last 300,000 years." Dr. Cerling emphasizes that "the geologic evidence shows that those carbonates were formed in the soil by water from above, not from the occurrence of the underground water table rising from below."

Dr. Cerling adds that this means the nuclear waste disposal site would not likely be flooded by groundwater. "There was no evidence from our investigation that indicated that the flooding of the nuclear waste is a likely outcome at this site."

While the researchers found no compelling evidence that the proposed HLRW site would pollute underground water, Dr. Cerling advises that much more research and investigative work needs to be performed. Meanwhile, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Department of Energy's office of civilian radioactive waste management are jointly studying Yucca Mountain's geologic suitability and had expected to release their findings and settle the issue later this year. However, a spokesman at the USGS says that the progress of their investigations is being hampered by the State of Nevada's persistent refusal to allow any on-site intrusive, drilling work to be conducted at Yucca Mountain.

"The issue of past and possible future changes in the water table at Yucca Mountain is going to be thoroughly studied," says Eugene Roseboom, PhD, of the USGS director's office. "It's clear

that the results of these studies will be very carefully examined by a large number of scientists for groups outside the DOE program: the National Research Council, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, the State of Nevada, and others." ■

Nuclear Medicine Week Update

This year, Nuclear Medicine Week will run from July 30 to August 6. Departments and divisions across the country are beginning to organize informative programs and events to enhance public awareness and understanding of nuclear medicine. GE will sponsor the sixth annual Media Stars Contest, which honors individuals responsible for planning and presenting the most effective public relations campaign for Nuclear Medicine Week. Posters and buttons promoting Nuclear Medicine Week will be available for order in late March. For further information or to obtain The Society of Nuclear Medicine's *Nuclear Medicine Week Guidelines* packet, contact: Virginia Pappas, CAE, The Society of Nuclear Medicine, 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-6760; 212-889-0717; fax: 212-545-0221. An article in the May 1991 *Newsline* will preview this year's poster and button. ■