

Carbon-14-Urea Capsules Receive Exempt Distribution

Effective January 2, 1998, physicians or other health care workers who are not authorized by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) or NRC agreement states to administer radioactive substances may now administer ¹⁴C-urea in capsule form (capsule containing 1 mCi of the tracer) to patients undergoing testing for detection of peptic ulcers. This amendment to 10 CFR Parts 30 and 32, published in the Federal Register in December 1997, was the result of a petition from rulemaking made by Tri-Med Specialties, Inc.

Tri-Med filed the petition based on studies that used ¹⁴C-urea to identify the bacterium that causes peptic ulcers. In the test, which is noninvasive, the patient swallows the capsule with water. Several minutes after tracer administration, the patient blows into a bag, which is sent to a laboratory for analysis.

Prior to the amendment, only NRC-authorized physicians could receive and administer the drug. Now, non-NRC-authorized physicians may administer the radiopharmaceutical instead of referring the patient to a nuclear medicine physician.

Although the amendment should result in wider distribution of the

tracer, it does not relieve individuals from complying with FDA and other regulations regarding receipt, administration and use of radiopharmaceuticals.

—Eleanore Tapscott

Joint Regulatory Survey to Obtain Estimates of Radioactivity in Sewage

In response to a General Accounting Office report recommending that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) determine the extent of increased levels of radionuclides at publicly owned treatment works (POTWs) and provide acceptable limits for radioactive materials at these sites, the NRC and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have submitted a proposal for a survey of POTWs across the nation. The survey is also in response to concerns stemming from the 1980s, when increased levels of radioactivity were observed in sewage sludge and incineration ash at several POTWs.

Currently, federal and state laws allow specific amounts of radioactive substances to be disposed of through local sewage systems, but the NRC revised its sewage disposal criteria in 1994 as a result of reports of recon-

centrating radioactive material in sewage sludge and incinerator ash.

According to the NRC, the joint agency survey will obtain national estimates of occurrences of elevated levels of radioactivity in sludge and ash at POTWs, estimate the extent to which radioactive contamination derives from NRC/NRC agreement state licensees or from naturally occurring radioactivity and support rulemaking decisions by the NRC and EPA.

The survey, currently awaiting clearance from the Office of Management and Budget, will be conducted in two phases. First, the NRC will distribute questionnaires to POTWs in various geographic regions, including areas with NRC licensees with the highest potential of disposing of low-level radioactive materials through local sewage systems. On the basis of questionnaire responses, the NRC and EPA will select about 300 POTWs to submit sewage sludge and ash for sampling. The Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, Oak Ridge, TN, and the National Air and Radiation Environmental Laboratory, Montgomery, AL, will analyze the sewage and sludge samples.

According to Phyllis Sobel of the NRC, the final report, scheduled for publication by 2000, will be used by the NRC and EPA to determine if regulatory changes are needed.

—Eleanore Tapscott