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FOR THE RECORD

**RESPONSE TO GAO AND NEWS REPORTS ABOUT
SECURITY OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS IN HOSPITALS**

On September 11, 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its final report on the security of radioactive materials at medical facilities in the United States. Subsequent media coverage contained several misconceptions and inaccuracies about the GAO report and the NRC's security requirements for risk-significant radioactive materials.

For example, it was widely reported that "nearly four out of five hospitals nationwide have failed to implement safeguards to secure radiological materials." One article even said, "Medical facilities currently are not required to take any specific actions to make sure these materials are safe." These statements are simply false.

In fact, these facilities are required to implement multiple layers of security measures including:

- *Background checks, including fingerprinting, to ensure that people with access to radioactive materials are **trustworthy and reliable**.*
- ***Personnel access controls** to areas where the materials are stored or used.*
- ***Security Plans and procedures** designed to detect, deter, assess & respond to unauthorized access attempts.*
- ***Coordination and response planning** between licensees and local law enforcement agencies.*
- ***Coordination and tracking** of radioactive material shipments.*
- ***Security barriers** to discourage theft of portable devices containing radioactive materials.*

The NRC and its Agreement State¹ partners issued Orders imposing these security requirements in 2005. The requirements allow licensees to develop security programs that are appropriate to their facilities and the level of risk posed by the radioactive materials they possess. Licensees are routinely inspected for compliance with the requirements and must correct any deficiencies identified. Enforcement actions may include civil penalties.

¹ The NRC has signed agreements with 37 states under which the states license and regulate commercial, industrial and medical uses of radioactive materials.

In addition to these *requirements*, the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) offers a *voluntary* program of additional security enhancements. As the GAO noted, 321 of approximately 1,500 eligible medical facilities have taken advantage of this program. These figures are the basis for the misleading statement in some media reports that "nearly four out of five hospitals nationwide have failed to implement safeguards." All of these hospitals have implemented the NRC's requirements; not all have accepted the NNSA's *voluntary* enhancements.

The GAO report identified some specific security concerns that are clear violations of the security requirements, while others were not described in sufficient detail to determine if they would be violations. Such isolated anecdotes do not indicate problems with the requirements themselves; rather they represent enforcement issues that should be referred to the proper regulatory authority – the NRC or the Agreement States. However, the GAO has not responded to several requests from NRC for the details of these security concerns, so action to correct them is not possible.

For more information about the NRC's approach to the security of radioactive materials, please refer to the following resources on the NRC public website:

[Radioactive Material Security Homepage](#)

NRC blog on "[Keeping radioactive materials safe and secure](#)"

Backgrounder on [Protection and Security of Radiation Sources](#)

YouTube video on [Source Security](#)