



Two packages of radioactive material sat under a counter in the main lobby of Walter Reed Army Medical Center for 44 hours, possibly exposing patients and staff to elevated radiation, according to an investigation by federal regulators. The packages were delivered May 1 to the hospital's concierge, who stored them under the counter, according to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The intended recipient, the hospital's administrative officer, didn't locate the package until the next Monday, two days later. An NRC spokesman said that the agency is not aware of anyone being harmed.

The administrative officer noticed that the medical center had not received the expected delivery and unsuccessfully tried to find it, according to an NRC spokesman. On May 3, the next workday, hospital officials continued their search and found the package at the concierge desk.

Walter Reed officials determined that radiation levels at the concierge desk were 2 millirems an hour, which exceeds allowable limits. The average American is exposed to 620 millirems a year, said Neil Sheehan, an NRC spokesman.

The violations at the Northwest Washington hospital follow a similar lapse there last year. The commission has scheduled a Sept. 1 hearing to help determine what, if any, enforcement action the commission will take.

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