

GEORGIA TECH RESEARCH

News Release

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GEORGIA TECH SUSPENDS

For Immediate Release

NUCLEAR REACTOR OPERATIONS

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Georgia Tech president, Dr. John P. Crecine, today ordered all reactor operations at the Neely Nuclear Research Center to be suspended immediately.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) had ordered a suspension of irradiation experiments at the Center last month. That suspension involved only about 20% of the activities of the Center. But Dr. Crecine said, "My decision is to voluntarily suspend the remaining 80% of reactor operations until such time as the NRC lifts its ban, until we have completed the expansion and upgrading of the group primarily responsible for reactor safety, and until the NRC has favorably reviewed our reactor safety procedures."

The NRC had ordered a halt to the irradiation experiments, in part because of what NRC termed "management control problems".

Dr. Crecine said, "I want to emphasize in the most emphatic way possible that this move does not in any way reflect concern on my part with the safety of reactor operations now or in the immediate past. It does reflect my belief that normal, safe, and efficient operations at this research facility are becoming increasingly difficult with the publicity surrounding Neely Nuclear Research Center operations and personnel."

The shutdown will impact the training of about 100 students, the research activities of a small number of faculty, some medical research for other institutions as well as radiation experiments for a number of other universities in the southeast.

Dr. Crecine said Georgia Tech will continue to address all concerns of the NRC, and Tech's independent Nuclear Safeguards Committee will continue to review the operations and procedures of the Center. In addition, Dr. William Kerr, the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards for the national office of the NRC, has agreed to come to Georgia Tech to evaluate the program and procedures.

The Tech president said, "We are accelerating development of detailed plans for the overhaul of the reactor facility, the modernization of its control systems, and the conversion of the reactor for the use of low enrichment fuels. This conversion is not related in any way to the safety of current reactor operations. The conversion has been mandated by the NRC, and only the timing is at issue."

At the same time, Dr. Crecine is appointing a special committee to study whether Georgia Tech should continue to operate the nuclear reactor or whether it should be decommissioned.

Georgia Tech is completely replacing the health physics staff, which is directly responsible for implementing radiation safety policies all over the campus, including those involving the reactor. He said, "We have taken major steps to significantly upgrade the quality of the health physics staff, to expand the staff and to improve the staff leadership."