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For Immediate Release

RE: Radiation and Radioactive Risk

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) has received inquiries recently around nuclear energy and Skilled Nursing facilities. The questions involve adding nuclear emergency response information to their Emergency Preparedness Plans (EPP).

Kansas does have one such facility, Wolf Creek Power Plant, located in Coffey County, near Burlington. An emergency at Wolf Creek, although unlikely, is possible. A problem with pumps, valves, or pipes inside the plant could cause it to stop operating properly. If problems escalate, it is possible that radioactive material may be released to the environment. If this should occur Coffey County will activate the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) for a Wolf Creek emergency, tornado, or natural disaster.

Skilled nursing facilities may be asked to shelter in place, protect your breathing or evacuate. If told to shelter-in-place, go inside, and stay inside the facility. Stay inside until radio or TV broadcasts report you can leave safely. Close all windows and doors. Turn off all sources of outside air (attic fans, window fans). Turn heating and air conditioning systems off. Listen to an emergency broadcast radio or television station for updates. Keep pets inside. If you are told to evacuate you should follow the evacuation procedures you already have in place while maintaining continued care.

For the emergency preparedness requirements, facilities are expected to develop a comprehensive Emergency Preparedness (EP) program and risk assessment based on an all-hazards approach. We define the all-hazards approach as an integrated approach to emergency preparedness that focuses on identifying hazards and developing emergency preparedness capacities and capabilities that can address those as well as a wide spectrum of emergencies or disasters. This approach includes preparedness for natural, man-made, and or facility emergencies that may include but are not limited to care-related emergencies; equipment and power failures; interruptions in communications, including cyber-attacks; loss of a portion or all of a facility; and interruptions in the normal supply of essentials, such as water and food. Planning for using an all-hazards approach should also include emerging infectious disease (EID) threats. Examples of EIDs include Influenza, Ebola, Zika Virus and others.

If your facility determines that nuclear/radiation risk should be added to the facility's risk assessment, there are no restrictions to this approach as a risk assessment should be based on the facility's geographic region, patient population and hazards determined by the facility and/or community.

Radiation and Radioactive materials: Radiation and radioactive materials are a natural part of our environment. They are in the air we breathe, the food we eat, the soil, our homes and even our bodies. The level of radiation naturally existing in our environment is called "background radiation." We are also exposed to sources of man-made radiation such as X-ray machines, and color televisions.

Most of the radiation dose we receive is from naturally occurring sources—most of this is from radon. The next largest dose is from medical radiation. The smallest dose we receive (less than one percent) is from nuclear power plant emissions and fallout from past atomic bomb detonations.

In Summary if your skilled nursing facility is close to a Nuclear Power plant where radiation or radioactive materials are used, you should include exposure to those materials as a possibility and make emergency preparedness plans on how your facility is going to handle this type of emergency. Additionally, radioactive materials travel through the state of Kansas periodically, if you have a railroad or highway running through your city we would recommend adding this to your emergency preparedness plans. This is a good time to review your shelter in place guidelines as well as your evacuation guidelines as you continue to develop your emergency preparedness plans.

If you have further questions, please email us at prevention@ks.gov