

Nuclear reactor has water storage leak

This is a small ore-test open pool reactor.

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A nuclear reactor's water storage tank is leaking just a few miles from north Denver.

The U.S. Geological Survey has notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) that a water storage tank associated with the nuclear research reactor in Lakewood, Colo., is experiencing leakage. Testing by USGS nuclear engineers shows leakage levels well below NRC reporting requirements. However, the USGS voluntarily contacted the NRC in an effort to keep them fully informed about the issue. The impacted tank is used for equipment storage and not reactor operations.

"Public safety is our number one concern," said Thomas Casadevall, USGS Central Region Director. "We wanted to disclose the information to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the public to ensure there is no misunderstanding about the situation."

USGS officials emphasized that no evidence of the leak has been detected at a nearby groundwater monitoring well on the Denver Federal Center. As an initial response, the USGS patched corroded spots in the storage tank, which has significantly reduced the problem. The agency will work with interested parties to safely and permanently resolve the issue.

USGS has operated the non-power nuclear research facility at the Denver Federal Center since 1969. One of approximately 25 nuclear research reactors nationwide, it is used to conduct research on geologic and biologic samples. One example of research at the facility is the use of the reactor to identify and analyze environmental contaminants that can affect human and wildlife health.

The USGS serves the nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life.