

Nuclear safety violations cited at Argonne

March 8 2006

The University of Chicago, which manages the Argonne National Laboratory for the federal government, has been charged with nuclear safety violations.

The university, which is seeking to extend the laboratory contract it has held for 60 years, was cited Tuesday for violations dating to 1999, The Chicago-Tribune reported Wednesday.

The U.S. Energy Department, which owns and funds Argonne, said it was only a matter of luck that nobody had been injured or exposed to radiation.

Stephen Sohinki, an Energy Department safety enforcement official, said he would not impose hefty fines for the violations because of the university's aggressive efforts to correct the deficiencies, the Tribune reported.

Infractions cited by Sohinki included inadequate training and authority for Argonne's nuclear safety officers, poor record keeping and several instances of failing to follow precise nuclear safety procedures.

When Argonne was established by the federal government 60 years ago, the University of Chicago was charged with managing the facility. Now a new federal law mandates the management of most national labs be subject to competitive bidding, and Argonne's bidding process started earlier this year.

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