Information about Possession Licences

A significant objective of the Radiation Safety Act 1999 is to protect persons and the environment from the risks associated with exposure to the radiation emitted by particular sources of radiation. To achieve this, the Act has established several requirements. This information sheet explains the arrangements to be met by persons (individuals or corporations) who are seeking to possess radiation sources in Queensland.

What is a Possession Licence?

A possession licence is the authorisation, granted under the Radiation Safety Act 1999, that is required to be obtained by a person seeking to possess or be in control of a radiation source, for a particular purpose. Individuals or corporations may hold this licence. Possession licences are granted by the Director-General of the Department of Health (chief executive).

What are the Responsibilities of a Possession Licensee?

The Act clearly places significant responsibilities and obligations on possession licensees. These responsibilities are outlined as follows:

(a) Radiation Safety and Protection Plans

The possession licensee is required to develop and implement a Radiation Safety and Protection Plan (RSPP) for the practice to be followed by all persons involved in carrying out the radiation practice. The RSPP must clearly:

(a) identify all of the radiation or radiation related hazards in the licensee’s practice;
(b) detail how the licensee manages these hazards to reduce health and environmental risks; and
(c) specify what structures or organisational arrangements the licensee has in place to ensure, on an ongoing basis, that the licensee’s plan is being adhered to and the radiation hazard is being adequately managed.

Prospective possession licensees may seek advice from Radiation Health in relation to the development of their RSPP.

(b) Appointing a Radiation Safety Officer

The Act requires each possession licensee to appoint a radiation safety officer. The specific functions of the radiation safety officer for the practice are detailed in the licensee's radiation safety and protection plan. The main function of the radiation safety officer is to advise the licensee on radiation safety in the practice.

A radiation safety officer is a person who has the knowledge, skills etc about the practice type as demonstrated by him or her being the holder of a Radiation Safety Officer Certificate for the practice. The possession licensee will need to verify that the person they appoint as the Radiation Safety Officer holds a current Radiation Safety Officer Certificate with an authorisation relevant to the radiation practice.
Possession licensees who are individuals may also appoint themselves as radiation safety officers if they:

- hold a Radiation Safety Officer Certificate granted under the Radiation Safety Act 1999; or
- hold a qualification prescribed in Schedule 5 of the Radiation Safety Regulation 2010, relevant to the practice.

(c) Approval to Acquire

Before taking possession of a radiation source either from an interstate or local supplier, or from another possession licensee, a possession licensee is required to hold an Approval to Acquire the source.

The approval to acquire arrangement is the means by which the chief executive controls and registers the radiation sources in Queensland, coming into Queensland, leaving Queensland, or being disposed of.

Before taking possession of the radiation source, the possession licensee should show the Approval to Acquire to the person supplying the source to demonstrate that the approval was granted. Under the Act, significant penalties exist if a supplier or another person gives a source to a person who does not have an Approval to Acquire the supplied source. The acquisition of the radiation source needs to be completed within the term of the approval, which will usually be one month unless otherwise requested by the applicant.

(d) Certificates of Compliance

It is the responsibility of the possession licensee to ensure their radiation sources and the premises where they are used, or where radioactive substances are stored, comply with the relevant Radiation Safety Standards whenever the radiation practice is being carried out. Compliance with the relevant radiation safety standard is required for radioactive substances stores prior to approvals to acquire such sources being granted.

Radiation Safety Standards set the minimum safety criteria for radiation sources and premises. Compliance with the standards assists in ensuring that public and occupational exposure to radiation is minimised. Copies of the standards may be obtained by going to the following site: www.health.qld.gov.au/radiationhealth.

To comply with this certification requirement, the possession licensee will need to engage a suitably accredited person to assess the radiation source or premises. If the accredited person finds that the radiation source or premises meets the applicable Radiation Safety Standard, a Certificate of Compliance will be issued. Re-assessment of the radiation source or premises is required before the end of the period prescribed in section 9 of the Radiation Safety Regulation in order to obtain a new Certificate of Compliance. The certificates should be kept by the possession licensee.

Please Note:
The chief executive will not send reminder or renewal notices regarding the requirement to obtain further Certificates of Compliance.

(e) Approval to Relocate

An Approval to Relocate is required if the possession licensee wishes to relocate a radiation source to a place outside of Queensland’s jurisdiction (whether inside or outside Australia). The granting of this approval is subject, inter alia, to the possession licensee complying with any intergovernmental agreement or international treaty about the movement of radiation sources. To help ensure this, the written approval for the proposed relocation, by the regulatory authority into the locality to which the applicant proposes to relocate the source must accompany the application for Approval to Relocate.

It is a condition of the approval that the possession licensee notifies the chief executive within seven days of the relocation being effected. This is to ensure the radiation source is properly tracked.

Note: An Approval to Relocate is not required if the possession licensee is remaining in possession of the radiation source, eg. if the source is being sent to an interstate service company for maintenance, repair etc.
(f) Disposal of Radiation Sources

- Disposal of radioactive material

Possession licensees may dispose of radioactive material, in a manner consistent with their radiation safety and protection plan, if the concentration of radionuclides in the material is less than that prescribed in the Radiation Safety Regulation 2010.

It is important to note that the concentrations for the disposal of radioactive materials are set at lower levels than the prescribed concentrations for which a person must obtain a licence. This is to ensure that contributions from a number of disposers do not result in a situation in which a member of the public can receive a dose of radiation greater than 1 mSv as a result of the radiation activity.

An Approval to Dispose is required if the possession licensee wishes to dispose of radioactive material in excess of the disposal levels prescribed in the Regulation. In considering the application, the chief executive will assess the potential radiation hazard to both people and the environment as a result of the disposal of the radioactive material.

- Disposal of radiation apparatus

Possession licensees may dispose of a radiation apparatus by rendering it incapable of producing radiation. This may be achieved by destroying the main components involved in the production of radiation, eg. the X-ray tube. In these circumstances, the possession licensee needs to notify the department of the disposal, in writing, within seven days after the disposal has been effected.

Term of Licence

A Possession Licence may have a term of one, two or three years. Under the Radiation Safety Act 1999, applications for renewal of licences must be made prior to the expiry of the current licence.

Enquiries

For further information, please contact the Radiation Health, Health Protection Unit of the Department of Health. The contact details for Radiation Health are:

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