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NEW REGIME FOR TESTING RADIATION EQUIPMENT

Environment and Conservation Minister Jay Weatherill has announced that a new system for compliance inspections of low-dose diagnostic medical and dental X-ray machines will be accelerated.

Under the new regime, independent qualified technicians will be accredited to conduct compliance tests on these X-ray machines.

The EPA inspects approximately 200 machines per year. Mr Weatherill said the EPA recently advised him that there was a backlog of about 300 diagnostic machines that had not been inspected because of a significant increase in the numbers of machines being installed over the past few years.

“Advances in technology have meant there are greater numbers of medical and dental diagnostic apparatus, which account for about three quarters of radiation apparatus in SA,” he said.

Between 2007 and 2008 there were more than 500 new machines installed, a significant increase on earlier years.

“This has improved health care to South Australians, but left the EPA with a growing inspection backlog of low-dose machines,” Mr Weatherill said.

“While in some States EPA inspections of many of these low-dose diagnostic machines is not required, they are in South Australia - which is why I’m announcing an accelerated roll-out of the new system, which we expect to be in place by the middle of the year.

“Importantly, the 10 high-dose radiation therapy linear accelerators in South Australia, used to treat tumours are and will continue to be inspected regularly and in a timely manner.

“The overwhelming majority of machines on the inspection backlog – almost 95 per cent - involves very low dose diagnostic X-ray machines such as dental X-ray units.

“I am told that the requirement for EPA officers to inspect every single piece of equipment, regardless of dose, is not the best use of EPA expert radiation officers in managing any risks

“Installation of radiation apparatus can only be undertaken by a person licensed by the EPA. This ensures installers are familiar with the regulatory requirements that apply to the types of apparatus they are licensed to install and operate and that the apparatus meets these requirements.”

SA agreed in 2004 to move to a system of accrediting third party assessors, as part of the National Directory for Radiation Protection framework.