Radiation Safeguards Added To CT Scanners

(Reuters) An industry group representing the top five manufacturers of CT equipment have committed to adding new safeguards in helping prevent excess exposure to radiation. The Medical Imaging & Technology Alliance said manufacturers will add a color-coded warning system to give health care providers clear indications of when they are doing scans that give patients potentially dangerous doses of radiation.

A chest CT scan exposes the patient to more than 100 times the radiation dose of a typical chest X-ray, and these higher doses of radiation can cause skin burns, cataracts and other injuries. The new safeguards would apply to machines made by General Electric, Toshiba, Hitachi, Siemens and Philips.

The changes, which would be phased in starting this year, would provide a yellow alert screen when the dose is higher than expected, and a red alert warning when a patient is about to be given a dangerous dose of radiation. The system will also allow hospitals and imaging centers to set their machines to prevent these scans from being done.

“Some of our companies will be able to provide features before the end of this year, based on when new releases become available,” Dave Fisher, executive director of the alliance, stated.

The group also promised that it will standardize the way radiation doses are recorded. “The dose information would be saved in a standard format, making it easier to integrate the information into a national dose registry, identical to what the president identified as one of the goals in his budget,” Fisher said.

The changes follow the FDA’s call earlier this month for makers of CT machines and other medical imaging equipment to add new safety features to their machines. CT scan use in the United States has grown sharply. About 70 million CT scans were done on Americans in 2007, up from 3 million in 1980.

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