NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION I
475 Allendale Road
King of Prussia, PA 19406

No. I-01-062 October 29, 2001
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TWO GAUGES CONTAINING RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL REPORTED STOLEN IN GREATER PHILADELPHIA REGION

Two portable moisture density gauges containing sealed sources of radioactive material were reportedly stolen in separate incidents last week. Anyone with information is asked to contact the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Headquarters Operations Center at (301) 816-5100.

The first incident occurred on October 22 at about 7:45 in the morning. In that case, a gauge was reported stolen from the back of a pick-up truck parked near a work site on Ruan Street, off Frankford Avenue, in Philadelphia. Underwood Engineering Testing Company, Inc., of Mt. Ephraim, N.J., told the NRC the gauge had been secured to the bed of the truck with a chain locked to an "eye" hook. The gauge, chain, lock and hook were all missing.

The gauge contains approximately 8 millicuries of cesium-137 and 40 millicuries of americium-241. The gauge makes its measurements by projecting the radiation from the two radioactive sources into the ground and then displaying the reflected radiation on a dial on top of the gauge.

The gauge, which reportedly was in its transportation case, consists of the shielding container with a plunger-type handle protruding from the top to be used to extend and then retract the radioactive source from the shielded position. When not in use, the handle is normally locked, with the source in the retracted, safely shielded position.

In the second incident, a gauge belonging to Trap Rock Industries of Kingston, N.J, was reportedly stolen from a job site near the intersection of Route 31 and Interstate 95 in Hopewell, N.J., on October 24. It happened at about 10:30 at night. The company told the NRC that a worker had set the gauge aside for a short time and when he returned, it was gone. The gauge contains 8 millicuries of cesium-137.

In both cases, the sources were locked in the shielded position inside the gauges and present no hazard to the public in that configuration. However, any attempt to tamper with the radioactive sources in the gauge would subject the person to radiation exposure. Handling of the unshielded sources outside their container would carry a risk of potentially dangerous radiation exposure.

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