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Nuclear Gauge Reported Stolen in West Virginia; Recovery is Sought



A West Virginia company has notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that a portable moisture-density gauge containing sealed sources of radioactive material has been stolen. Thrasher Engineering, of Bridgeport, W.Va., reported that the device was stolen early on Saturday, Sept. 10, from a technician's truck while it was parked in Beaver, W.Va.

Surveillance video acquired by local police shows an individual parking a white pickup truck next to the truck holding the gauge and then transferring the device to his or her vehicle. The gauge was apparently locked by two different means, as required by NRC regulations.

The gauge holds small amounts of cesium-137 and americium-241. It is used to make measurements by projecting the radiation from the two radioactive sources into the ground and then displaying the reflected radiation

on a dial on its top.

Stored in a robust, yellow transportation case when not in use, the gauge consists of a shielding container with a plunger-type handle protruding from the top. As long as the radioactive sources are in the shielded position, the gauge would present no hazard to the public. However, any attempt to tamper with the radioactive sources in the device could subject the person to radiation exposure.

Handling of the unshielded sources outside their container would carry a risk of potentially dangerous radiation exposure.

Anyone seeing the gauge should leave it alone and report its location to the NRC's Operations Center, at (301) 816-5100, or the Raleigh County, W.Va., Sheriff's Office, at 304-255-9300. The NRC Operations Center is staffed 24 hours a day and accepts collect calls.

An NRC inspector will be sent to the company's offices to gather more information on the loss of the gauge.

Law enforcement authorities are investigating the theft. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources DHHR has been notified about the loss of the gauge.