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NUCLEAR GAUGE REPORTED STOLEN IN NEW JERSEY; RECOVERY IS SOUGHT

A New Jersey company has notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that a portable moisture-density gauge containing sealed sources of radioactive material has been stolen.

U.S. Engineering Labs, Inc., of Rahway, N.J., reported that a car belonging to one of its employees was stolen from a parking spot at an apartment complex on Wilkenson Street in Elizabeth, N.J., sometime early yesterday. Police were informed of the theft at about 7 a.m. yesterday. The vehicle was a dark-blue, four-door 1992 Honda Accord. In the trunk of the car was the device, a Troxler Model 3411 nuclear gauge.

The device 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 its top.

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

As long as the 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. The center is staffed 24 hours a day and accepts collect calls.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has been notified about the loss of the gauge.



A typical carrying case for a moisture-density gauge.



A typical moisture-density gauge in use.

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