



NRC NEWS

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A pawn shop owner in Virginia Beach notified the NRC Operations Center on Friday, October 29, 2004, that the gauge was at the shop. The shop owner told the NRC he recognized the gauge from a newscast asking the public for assistance in recovering the gauge. Foundation Engineering Science, Inc. retrieved the gauge on Friday afternoon.

NUCLEAR GAUGE REPORTED STOLEN IN VIRGINIA; RECOVERY OF DEVICE IS SOUGHT

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

Foundation Engineering Science, Inc., based in Newport News, Va., reported to the NRC on Oct. 25 that one of its employees acknowledged the loss of a Troxler Model 3430 nuclear gauge that had been checked out for use at a Norfolk, Va., work site. The individual reported stopping at a Wal-Mart store in Norfolk on the morning on Oct. 18. After shopping, the worker returned to his company pick-up truck to discover the gauge was missing.

A review of a security videotape showed two individuals taking the device and driving off in a blue car at about 10 a.m. that day. Norfolk police were subsequently contacted and a police report was filed on the theft.

The gauge was in its yellow transportation container at the time it was removed. According to the company, the container was not locked nor was it secured to the vehicle, as required by NRC regulations. The NRC will review the loss of the gauge and determine whether enforcement action is warranted.

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 device 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



A typical carrying case for a moisture-density gauge.



A typical moisture-density gauge in use.

carry a risk of potentially dangerous radiation exposure.

The gauge's serial number is 29129. It is listed on a metal plate on top of the device. 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.

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