



Department of Justice

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

June 23, 2011
For Immediate Release

LUNAR MATERIAL RECOVERED

St. Louis, MO - The United States Attorney's Office announced that what is believed to be lunar material stolen from National Aeronautics and Space Administration decades ago was safely returned on Monday of this week to its laboratories at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

The material consists of moon dust removed from the film cartridge of a camera used by astronauts on the surface of the moon during the Apollo 11 Mission. The moon dust is believed to have been smuggled out by a NASA employee that had access to the camera that was used on the Apollo 11 Mission. NASA investigators believe that the employee removed the moon dust using a 1-inch piece of tape and that the tape was later sold in 2001 to a German national who deals in space-related memorabilia. Since then the trail has grown cold as it is believed the tape was cut into several smaller segments and sold to unknown purchasers. This would be the first of the segments to be recovered.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for Eastern Missouri first learned in early June that the dust was going to be listed for auction by Regency-Superior Auctions in its St. Louis office. Regency is the oldest and one of the largest auctioneers of space and aviation memorabilia in the world. Investigators from NASA's Office of Inspector General out of the Kennedy Space Center then contacted Regency who cooperated with the investigation and, with the permission of the consignor, withdrew the material from auction. The name of the consignor is not being released. She had not been involved in its purchase and was unaware of its history or how it had been acquired by her late husband. Upon learning that the material had been stolen from NASA years earlier, she immediately and graciously agreed to relinquish it back to the American people.

Investigators from the U.S. Attorney's Office retrieved the material from the Regency Superior Auctions last Friday. On having the lunar material in his office for a day, United States Attorney Richard Callahan quipped, "It wasn't much to look at, but I will never be that close to the moon again!"

Preliminary testing by the Johnson Space Center laboratory late yesterday confirmed that the material is in all likelihood lunar, although it will take another 2-3 weeks to complete full testing.

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TIME

Friday, Jun. 24, 2011

Shocking Find: Missing Moon Dust at Auction House

By Karen Ball

It was one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind, and a lot of people wanted a piece of it. Now, some 40 years after moon dust brought back from the Apollo 11 mission went missing, it was recovered at a St. Louis auction house and returned to the Johnson Space Center in Houston this week.

"It's a speck — the size of a fingertip," said David Kols of Regency-Superior auction house, where the dust had been placed for sale. "But it's lunar material, and since we're not going back to the moon in my lifetime or yours, that makes it worth a lot to some people." ([See TIME's special report on the 40th anniversary of the moon landing.](#))

The U.S. attorney's office in St. Louis, which announced the recovery of the moon dust on June 23, said that investigators with NASA believed the dust had come from the film cartridge of a camera used by astronauts on humanity's first trip to the moon in 1969. The dust was lifted from the cartridge using a 1-in. (2.5 cm) piece of clear tape. Somehow, it reached the black market and was sold in 2001, NASA investigators believe, to a German collector who cut up the tape into tiny slivers rather than return it to the U.S. government.

When investigators from both NASA and the U.S. attorney's office noticed moon dust listed for sale in St. Louis, they shut down the transaction with the cooperation of the auction house and the seller. The widow trying to sell the dust — her name was not released — said she didn't know where her late husband had purchased it. She "immediately and graciously agreed to relinquish it back to the American people," the U.S. attorney's office said.

The auction house had estimated its value at \$1,000 to \$1,500. ([See photos of Mercury.](#))

Preliminary testing by the Johnson Space Center's lab has concluded that the material in "all likelihood" is lunar, but final results will take a few weeks.


More than 800 lb. (363 kg) of moon rocks, pebbles, sand and dust were ferried back to Earth during the Apollo

lunar missions, which ended in late 1972. The overwhelming majority of the material was kept for analysis, but a handful of samples were given to museums, individual states and foreign dignitaries. Some are now unaccounted for, and there are many fakes for sale. A moon rock given to Missouri during the administration of Governor Christopher "Kit" Bond, who was first elected in 1972, was found last year in a box of memorabilia when Bond cleaned out his office after four terms in the U.S. Senate. Bond promptly returned the rock to the current governor, Jay Nixon.

The story of the film canister and the stolen dust had been considered a hoax by some, U.S. attorney Rich Callahan said. This discovery, even a little speck, suggests the story is true — though you have to peer really, really close. "The truth is, it's not much to look at," said Callahan. "You have to believe it's there."

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News Moon Dust Stolen from NASA Recovered in St. Louis

By Chad Garrison Thu., Jun. 23 2011 at 1:09 PM Categories: News

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A speck of moon dust believed to have been smuggled out of NASA years ago has returned to the space agency after spending time in both Germany and St. Louis.

The dust was supposed to be placed up for auction this month in St. Louis when NASA authorities were made aware of the material. David Kols, president of the auction house Regency Superior, tells Daily RFT that prior to the June 10 auction he presented NASA with a catalog of items available for bid.

"They contacted me and said the dust couldn't be sold, and they wanted to confiscate it," says Kols. "In turn, I called the consignor, and she agreed to give it to NASA."

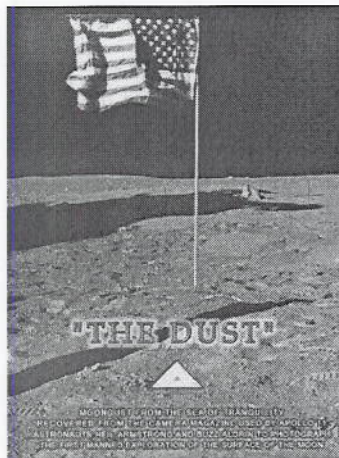
The U.S. Attorney's Office for Eastern Missouri confirms that Regency Superior and the consignor did no wrong and were not aware that the material had been stolen.

NASA contends that a former employee with access to a camera used on the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing put the dust on a 1-inch piece of tape and smuggled it out of the space agency. In 2001, the employee allegedly sold the dust to a German collector. The tape holding the dust is then believed to have been cut up into smaller pieces and resold.

Kols, with Regency Superior, describes the moon dust he planned to sell this month as a "speck" with an estimated value of between \$1,000 and \$1,500. He also says that the stories he's heard differ as to whether the NASA employee stole the dust or was given it as a gift.

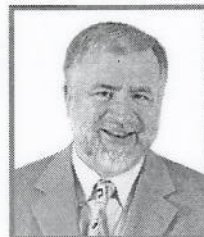
"Either way, it seems he was not to have sold the dust to other collectors," says Kols.

The woman who consigned it to Kols had received it from her late husband, who purchased it from the German collector (spaceflori.com) and was unaware of its dubious provenance.



The "speck" in question. Click photo for a full-size view of the moon dust.

www.regencystamps.com



David Kols www.regencystamps.com

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Kols says that this is not the first time that NASA has contacted his auction house over an item up for bid. Regency Superior, with offices in St. Louis and Beverly Hills, has become one of the nation's biggest auctioneers of space memorabilia thanks to its initial business serving stamp collectors.

"There have been so many stamps issued with space themes that stamp collectors have grown to become the biggest collectors of space memorabilia," explains Kols.

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