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

Authorities are seeking the return of a portable nuclear gauge that was stolen from a worksite in the City of Philadelphia on Monday, March 19. The gauge, containing small amounts of radioactive material, is used for industrial purposes such as measuring the density of soil at construction sites.

Anyone with information regarding the device is asked to contact the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Headquarters Operations Center at (301) 816-5100. Collect calls will be accepted. The center is staffed 24 hours a day.

Underwood Engineering, of Belmar, N.J., reported the gauge and its bright-yellow transportation case were stolen from a truck parked at a construction worksite at Audenreid High School Replacement Project at 3301 Tasker St., Phila. The theft occurred between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m. on March 19. It was noticed that the gauge, which had been locked in the bed of the vehicle, was missing at the end of the workday.

The Philadelphia Police Department was notified of the incident and responded to the area. Underwood Engineering is offering a reward for the return of the gauge.

The gauge holds small quantities of cesium-137 and americium-241. It consists of a 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.

As long as the source is in the shielded position, the gauge does not present a hazard to the public. However, any attempt to tamper with the source would subject the person doing so to potential radiation exposure. Handling of an unshielded source outside of the container would carry a risk of potentially dangerous exposure.



A typical carrying case for a moisture density gauge



A typical moisture density gauge in use

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