

October 11, 1996

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-IV-96-055

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by Region IV staff in Arlington, Texas on this date.

FacilityLicensee Emergency Classification

VA Medical Center, Houston, Texas	Notification of Unusual Event
VA Medical Center, Houston, Texas	Alert
2002 Holcombe Blvd.	Site Area Emergency
Houston, Texas 77030	General Emergency
Dockets: 03003255 License No: 42-00084-06 X Not Applicable	

Subject: LOST AMERICIUM-241 SOURCE

On October 10, 1996, the licensee reported the loss of a 130 microcurie americium-241 source to the NRC Operations Center. The licensee's radiation safety officer (RSO) reported that while performing a special inventory on October 8, 1996, he became aware that a Packard scintillation counter was missing from the medical center's research building. The counter had not been used for some period of time and had been stored in the basement of the research building. The counter contained two sources, a radium-226 source of approximately 20 microcuries and the americium-241 source. Through discussions with the research staff and review of records maintained at the medical center, the RSO determined that the counter was transferred, with the sources in place, to a scrap dealer in February 1996. Although the RSO did not know the name of the scrap dealer at the time of the initial report, documents relating to the sale of the unit indicate that the scrap dealer is located in Austin, Texas. The licensee has contacted the manufacturer to obtain a description of the sources and their location within the counter. A Packard representative stated that the sources are spherical in shape, approximately 0.25 inch in diameter, and colored red or green. The model number of the counter and sources are not currently known by the RSO.

Licensee representatives have contacted the scrap dealer and have requested information regarding the final disposition of the counter. Further information from the scrap dealer is expected by October 14, 1996. The licensee has agreed to contact Region IV once the final disposition of the sources is known, and Region IV will review this incident during an onsite inspection.

The state of Texas will be informed.

Region IV received notification of this occurrence by telephone from the NRC Operations Center at 7:28 p.m. (CT) on October 10, 1996. The information was confirmed with licensee representatives at 8:15 a.m. on October 11. Region IV has informed NMSS.

This information herein has been discussed with the licensee and is current as of 12 p.m. (CT) October 11, 1996.

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