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STOLEN RADIOGRAPHIC CAMERA COULD POSE SERIOUS HEALTH HAZARD

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has been informed that a portable radiographic camera was stolen from Mattingly Testing Services' office in Billings, Montana, sometime during the past two weeks. NRC officials are concerned because this device contains radioactive material and could pose a serious health hazard if the radioactive material is removed from its protective container.

The NRC, which regulates the use of radioactive materials in Montana, is working with the Yellowstone County Sheriff's department and officials of Mattingly to recover the stolen camera. The NRC understands that Mattingly has offered a \$500-reward for return of the camera.

The camera is a toaster-sized stainless steel box measuring 11 inches in length, four inches in width, and nine inches in height, with a handle at the top. It was clearly marked as containing radioactive material, but may have been defaced since being stolen. The camera weighs 52 pounds.

The radioactive source is normally locked within the shielded camera so that it will not pose any danger to anyone coming in contact with it. However, if the radioactive source is removed from the steel container it is extremely hazardous. Although the effects of radiation would not be noticed immediately, serious radiation burns and tissue damage could appear within days if the unshielded source was kept in close contact with a person for even a few minutes.

The radioactive source is in a metal capsule attached to the end of a steel wire about eight inches long and one-eighth inch in diameter. The stolen device may have been discarded along the roadside or other public area if the thieves had no further use for it.

If anyone should see this device or source lying about unprotected, their immediate action should be to avoid contact with it and, as quickly as possible, call the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office at 406-256-2935, Mattingly Testing Services at 406-248-6375, or call the NRC collect at 301-816-5100.

Do not attempt to pick up the source wire or place it in any type of container. Trained specialists from Mattingly, the police, or the NRC are available to respond quickly.

The NRC wishes to re-emphasize the urgency of recovering this radiographic device as quickly as possible and urges the people in Billings and the surrounding areas to be alert for it.