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NNSA, Temple University Successfully Remove Radiological Device from Campus Medical Building

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and Philadelphia's Temple University today announced the successful shipment of a radiological device from the university's Old Medical School Building. Formerly used as a research irradiator for medical research, the device helped to make critical advancements in medical science for the past two decades. The material contained within the irradiator however, cesium-137, could be attractive for use in a dirty bomb. The removal was part of NNSA's global campaign to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear and radiological material.

Working in partnership with Temple University and state and local regulators, NNSA removed the irradiator and transported it to a secure location where it will be prepared for disposal at a federal facility. To date, NNSA has recovered more than 31,000 disused and unwanted radioactive sealed sources in the U.S., eliminating more than 1,000,000 curies of activity.

"This operation is part of NNSA's broad strategy to keep dangerous nuclear and radiological material safe and secure by enhancing our nation's security," said NNSA Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation Anne Harrington. "This mission demonstrates how NNSA utilizes its unique expertise and technical resources to partner with local communities and other agencies to make our cities safer here and around the world."

"This research irradiator made significant contributions for over 18 years to radiological research at Temple University. Scientists now are using more advanced devices to perform their state-of-the-art research," said Lily Lodhi, Director of Environmental Health and Radiation Safety at Temple University.

The operation was led by NNSA's Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI). GTRI collaborates with partner sites like Temple University, the private sector, and state, local, and federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to enhance existing domestic radiological security. NNSA's work to prevent terrorists from acquiring radiological materials includes providing voluntary security enhancements for radioactive materials and removing radioactive materials that are no longer being used. GTRI was supported on this project with technical experts from Los Alamos National Laboratory and Idaho National Laboratory.

Prior to decommissioning the device, Temple University volunteered and worked with GTRI to install security enhancements for all Temple facilities with high-activity radiological materials.

The City of Philadelphia has also played a critical leadership role in GTRI's radiological security efforts. Cooperation between NNSA and Philadelphia began in 2005. Since then, GTRI has worked in Philadelphia to secure 28 buildings with high-activity radiological materials and provide radiological security alarm response training to more than 138 local law enforcement officers, site security and other first responders. GTRI has also collaborated with the FBI to host a table-top exercise with federal, state and local officials to exercise security alarm response and crisis/consequence management skills in response to a terrorist event involving nuclear or radiological materials.

Every year, thousands of sources become disused and unwanted in the U.S. While regulatory requirements for in-place secure storage exist, GTRI works to remove these unused and unwanted sources for permanent, safe disposition. As part of NNSA's nuclear security mission, GTRI works to reduce and protect vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials located at sites worldwide – including in the U.S.

For more information on GTRI and NNSA's work to reduce and protect vulnerable nuclear and radiological material click here [1].

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Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing; works to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction; provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion; and responds to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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