



# NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I  
475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa. 19406

E-mail: [opa1@nrc.gov](mailto:opa1@nrc.gov)

Site: [www.nrc.gov](http://www.nrc.gov)

Blog: <http://public-blog.nrc-gateway.gov>

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Contact: Diane Screnci, (610) 337-5330  
Neil Sheehan, (610) 337-5331

Email: [OPA1.RESOURCE@nrc.gov](mailto:OPA1.RESOURCE@nrc.gov)

## **NRC PROPOSES CIVIL PENALTY FOR VIRGINIA FIRM FOR TEMPORARY LOSS OF PORTABLE NUCLEAR GAUGE**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a \$3,500 fine for an Ashburn, Va., engineering firm for a violation of agency requirements involving the control and security of NRC-licensed radioactive materials. The violation stems from the temporary loss of a portable nuclear gauge in December 2010 at the Fort George G. Meade Army Base, in Fort Meade, Md.

On Dec. 2, 2010, GeoConcepts discovered that one of its portable nuclear gauges had been taken during a suspected theft of construction equipment. At the time, the gauge was stored at a temporary job site at the Army base. The gauge contains a small amount of radioactive material and is used for such purposes as measuring soil density at construction sites.

The gauge was last seen on the afternoon of Nov. 29, 2010. It had been stored inside a lock-box and chained to the exterior of a sea-land container at the construction site. The NRC was notified of the missing gauge, as was the base police force. On Dec. 10, 2010, GeoConcepts was notified by base police that they had recovered a locked portable gauge transport case with the company's name on it. Subsequent investigation determined it was the missing device and that it did not appear to have been tampered with.

An NRC inspection performed in March and April 2011 found that GeoConcepts did not, as required by NRC regulations, use a minimum of two independent physical controls to secure the portable gauge from unauthorized removal, when the device was not under the control and constant surveillance of company personnel.

During a Predecisional Enforcement Conference with NRC staff on June 29, 2011, GeoConcepts representatives stated that, in their opinion, the gauge had been secured in accordance with NRC requirements. Specifically, it was housed inside of its locked transport case, which was inside of a lock box. The lock box was secured to the exterior of the sea-land container by a chain and lock.

However, the NRC has determined only one barrier – a single lock and chain – was provided to prevent removal of the lock box, which was not consistent with the requirements and made it easier for the gauge to be removed without authorization.

GeoConcepts has implemented actions to prevent a recurrence.

The company is required to provide the NRC with a written reply within 30 days.

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