

The Safety and Security Implications of the December 2013 Radioactive Source Theft Event in Mexico

On 2 December 2013 a high activity radioactive source was reported as stolen during transport from a Mexican hospital to a source storage facility. Initial reports suggested that the thieves were primarily interested in stealing the truck that was carrying the source. But while exploring the cargo that the truck was carrying, the thieves removed the source from its shielded holder, likely not understanding the associated health risks. Fortunately, the source was found by Mexican authorities two days later and efforts are currently underway to recover and secure the source. The health effects being experienced by the individuals intimately exposed to the source are still being determined.

This event received international attention, not because of the public health measures enacted, but because of the potential negative outcomes that could have occurred, some with much broader implications. This presentation will discuss the case, describing (1) what happened, (2) what is likely to happen next, (3) what could have happened, and (4) the safety and security implications of this type of event. Research activities carried out at University of Texas School of Public Health on this exact issue will be summarized and opportunities for future research in this area will be discussed.



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Speaker biography

Bob Emery has over 30 years of experience in health & safety and possesses masters degrees in radiological hygiene from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and environmental health from East Carolina University, and a doctorate in occupational health from the University of Texas School of Public Health. He holds the unique distinction of being the only person to hold national board certification in all of the seven main areas of health & safety;

- health physics [Certified Health Physicist, CHP],
- occupational safety [Certified Safety Professional, CSP],
- biological safety [Certified Biological Safety Professional, CBSP],
- industrial hygiene [Certified Industrial Hygienist, CIH],
- hazardous materials management [Certified Hazardous Materials Manager, CHMM],
- security management [Certified Protection Professional, CPP]
- and risk management [Associate in Risk Management, ARM].