

Appendix A: Radiation

This appendix gives basic information about radiation. This information is intended to be a basis for understanding normal radiation dose from sources unassociated with the Paducah Site. People are constantly exposed to radiation. For example, radon in air; potassium in food and water; and uranium, thorium, and radium in the earth's crust are all sources of radiation. The following discussion describes important aspects of radiation, including atoms and isotopes; types, sources, and pathways of radiation; radiation measurement; and dose information.

ATOMS AND ISOTOPES

All matter is made up of **atoms**. The atom is thought to consist of a dense central nucleus surrounded by a cloud of electrons. The nucleus is composed of protons and neutrons. **Table A.1** summarizes the basic components of an atom. In an electrically neutral atom, the number of protons equals the number of electrons. Atoms can lose or gain electrons through ionization. The number of protons in the nucleus determines an element's atomic number, or chemical identity. With the exception of hydrogen, the nucleus of each type of atom also contains at least one neutron. Unlike protons, the number of neutrons may vary among atoms of the same element. The number of neutrons and protons determines the atomic weight of the atom.

Atoms of the same element with a different number of neutrons are called **isotopes**. Isotopes have the same chemical properties but different atomic weights. **Figure A.1** depicts isotopes of the

element hydrogen. Uranium, which has 92 protons, is another example of an element that has isotopes. All isotopes of uranium have 92 protons. However, each uranium isotope has a different number of neutrons. ^{234}U has 92 protons and 142 neutrons; ^{235}U has 92 protons and 143 neutrons; and ^{238}U has 92 protons and 146 neutrons.

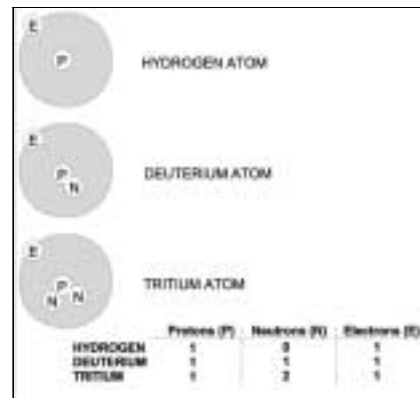


Figure A.1 Isotopes of the element hydrogen.

Table A.1 Summary of the basic parts of an atom.

Particle	Location	Charge	Comments
Protons	Nucleus	+ positive	The number of protons determines the element. If the number of protons changes, the element changes.
Neutrons	Nucleus	No charge	Atoms of the same element have the same number of protons, but can have a different number of neutrons. This is called an isotope.
Electrons	Orbit nucleus	- negative	This negative charge is equal in magnitude to the proton's positive charge.

Source: Bechtel Jacobs Company, LLC. *Radiological Worker I and II Academics Training*, Student Handbook, revision 2.

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT RADIATION

Radioactivity was discovered in 1896 by the French physicist Antoine Henri Becquerel when he observed that the element, uranium, can blacken a photographic plate, even when separated from the plate by glass or black paper. In 1898, the French chemists Marie Curie and Pierre Curie concluded that radioactivity is a phenomenon associated with atoms, independent of their physical or chemical state. The Curies measured the heat associated with the decay of radium and established that 1 g (0.035 oz) of radium gives off about 100 cal of energy every hour. This release of energy continues hour after hour and year after year, whereas the complete combustion of a gram of coal results in the production of a total of only about 8000 cal of energy. Radioactivity attracted the attention of scientists throughout the world, following these early discoveries. In the ensuing decades, many aspects of the phenomenon were thoroughly investigated (“Radioactivity” 2002, Appendix A references).

Radiation is energy in the form of waves or particles moving through space. Radiation occurs because unstable atoms give off excess energy to become stable. **Ionization** is the process of removing electrons from neutral atoms. NOTE: Ionization should not be confused with radiation. Ionization is a result of the interaction of radiation with an atom, and is what allows the radiation to be detected. **Ionizing radiation** is energy (particles or rays) emitted from radioactive atoms that can cause ionization. Ionizing radiation is capable of displacing electrons and changing the chemical state of matter and subsequently causing biological damage. Therefore, ionizing radiation is potentially harmful to human health. Examples of ionizing radiation include alpha, beta, and gamma radiation. **Non-ionizing radiation** bounces off or passes through matter without displacing electrons. Non-ionizing radiation does not have enough energy to ionize an atom. It is unclear whether non-ionizing radiation is harmful to human health. Examples include visible light, radar waves, microwaves, and radio waves. **Radioactivity** is the process of unstable, or radioactive, atoms becoming stable by emitting radiant energy. Radioactivity that occurs over a period of time is called **radioactive decay**. The discovery that radium decays to produce radon proved conclusively that radioactive decay is accompanied by a change in the chemical nature of the decaying element. A

disintegration is a single atom undergoing radioactive decay. **Radioactive half-life** is the time it takes for one-half of the radioactive atoms present to decay (Bechtel Jacobs Company, LLC., Appendix A references).

TYPES, SOURCES, AND PATHWAYS OF RADIATION

Visible light, heat, radio waves, and alpha particles are examples of radiation. When people feel warmth from the sunlight, they are actually absorbing the radiant energy emitted by the sun. Electromagnetic radiation is radiation in the form of electromagnetic waves; examples include gamma rays, ultraviolet light, and radio waves. Particulate radiation is radiation in the form of particles; examples include alpha and beta particles. The spectrum of particle and electromagnetic radiations ranges from the extremely short wavelengths of cosmic rays and electrons to very long radio waves that are hundreds of kilometers in length. **Figure A.2** shows the difference between a longer wavelength and a shorter wavelength. **Figure A.3** illustrates the wavelengths of several types of radiation along with an example of something that is approximately the same dimension in length.

The Radiation’s ability to penetrate material is an important consideration in protecting human health. Adequate shielding decreases the power of radiation by absorbing part or all of it. **Figure A.4** shows the different penetrating power of alpha, beta, and gamma rays. Alpha rays are stopped by the thickness of a few sheets of paper or a rubber glove. A few centimeters of wood or a thin sheet of copper stops beta rays. Gamma rays and X-rays require thick shielding of a heavy material, such as iron, lead, or concrete (“Radiation” 2002, Appendix A references).

Radiation is everywhere. Most occurs naturally, but a small percentage is from human-made sources. Naturally occurring radiation is identical to the radiation resulting from human-made sources.

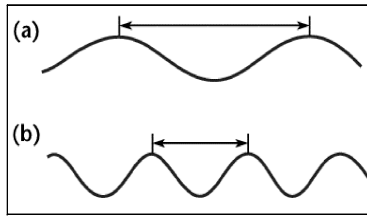


Figure A.2 Comparison between longer (a) and shorter (b) wavelengths^a.

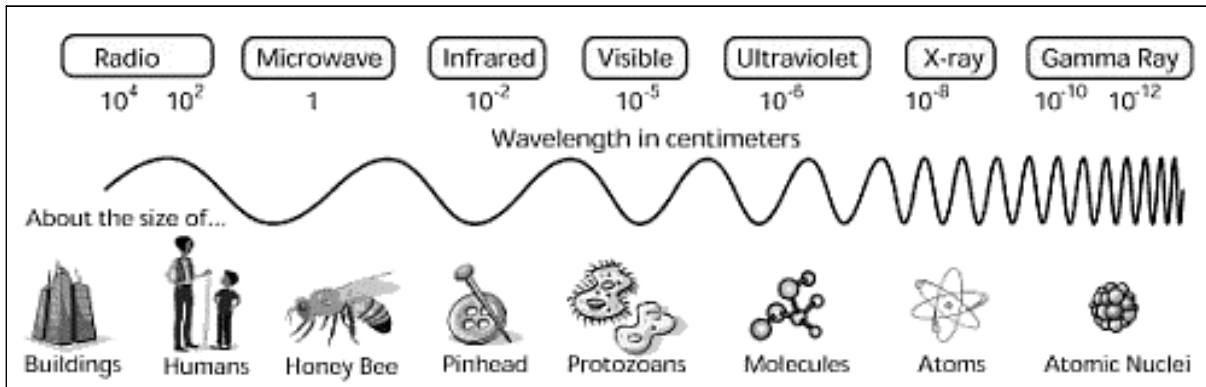


Figure A.3 The approximate wavelengths of the various regions of the electromagnetic spectrum and an example of something that is approximately the same size^b.

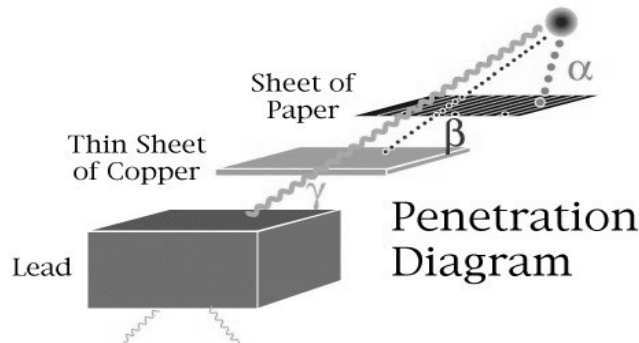


Figure A.4 The penetrating potential of the three types of ionizing radiation: alpha, beta, and gamma^c.

^a (“Electromagnetic...” 2002, Appendix A references)

^b (“Exploring ...” 2002, Appendix A references)

^c (“Experiment...” 2002, Appendix A references)

Naturally occurring radiation is known as **background radiation**. In fact, this naturally occurring radiation is the major source of radiation in the environment. People have little control over the amount of background radiation to which they are exposed. Background radiation remains relatively constant over time. The amount of background radiation present in the environment today is much the same as it was hundreds of years ago. Sources of background radiation include uranium in the earth, radon in the air, and potassium in food. Depending on its origin, background radiation is categorized as cosmic, terrestrial, or internal. **Cosmic radiation** comes from the sun and outer space and is made up of energetically charged particles from that continuously hit the earth's atmosphere. Because the atmosphere provides some shielding against cosmic radiation, the intensity of cosmic radiation increases with altitude above sea level. Therefore, a person in Denver, Colorado, is exposed to more cosmic radiation than a person in Paducah, Kentucky. **Terrestrial radiation** refers to radiation emitted from radioactive materials in the earth's rocks, soils, and minerals. Radon (Rn); radon progeny, the relatively short-lived decay products of radium-235 (^{235}Ra); potassium (^{40}K); isotopes of thorium (Th); and isotopes of uranium (U) are the elements responsible for most terrestrial radiation. **Internal radiation** is radiation that is inside the body and is in close contact with body tissue. Internal radiation can deposit large amounts of energy in a small amount of tissue. Radioactive material in the environment enters the body through the air people breathe, the food they eat, and even through an open wound. Natural radionuclides in the body include isotopes of U, Th, Ra, Rn, Pu, bismuth (Bi), and lead in the ^{238}U and ^{232}Th decay series. In addition, the body contains isotopes of sodium-24 (^{24}Na), ^{40}K , rubidium (Rb), and carbon-14 (^{14}C). Most of our internal exposure comes from ^{40}K .

In addition to background radiation, there are human-made sources of radiation to which most people are exposed. Examples include consumer products, medical sources, and other sources. Some **consumer products** are sources of radiation. In some of these products, such as smoke detectors and airport X-ray baggage inspection systems, the radiation is essential to the performance of the device. In other products, such as televisions and

tobacco products, the radiation occurs incidentally to the product function. **Medical sources** of radiation account for the majority of the exposure people receive from human-made radiation. Radiation is an important tool of diagnostic medicine and treatment. Exposure is deliberate and directly beneficial to the patients exposed. Generally, diagnostic or therapeutic medical exposures result from X-ray beams directed to specific areas of the body. Thus, all body organs generally are not irradiated uniformly. Radiation and radioactive materials are also used in a wide variety of pharmaceuticals and in the preparation of medical instruments, including the sterilization of heat-sensitive products such as plastic heart valves. Nuclear medical examinations and treatment involve the internal administration of radioactive compounds, or radiopharmaceuticals, by injection, inhalation, consumption, or insertion. Even then, radionuclides are not distributed uniformly throughout the body. **Other sources** of radiation include fallout from atmospheric atomic weapons tests; emissions of radioactive materials from nuclear facilities such as uranium mines, fuel processing plants, and nuclear power plants; emissions from mineral extraction facilities; and transportation of radioactive materials. Atmospheric testing of atomic weapons has been suspended. About one-half of 1% of the United States population performs work in which radiation in some form is present.

Radiation and radioactive material in the environment can reach people through many routes. Potential routes for radiation are referred to as **pathways**. Several radiation pathways are shown in **Figure A.5**. For example, radioactive material in the air could fall on a pasture. Cows could then eat the grass, and the radioactive material on the grass would show up in the cow's milk. People drinking the milk would thus be exposed to this radiation. Or, people could simply inhale the radioactive material in the air. The same events could occur with radioactive material in water. Fish living in the water would be exposed. People eating the fish would then be exposed to the radiation in the fish. Or, people swimming in the water would be exposed.

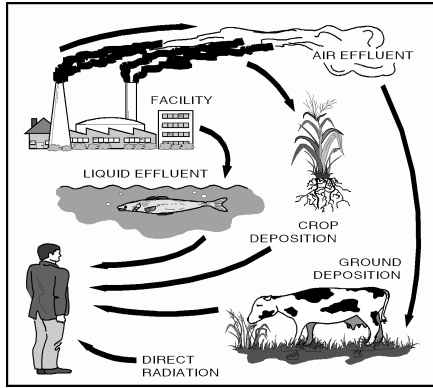


Figure A.5 Possible radiation pathways.

MEASURING RADIATION

To determine the possible effects of radiation on the environment and the health of people, the radiation must be measured. More precisely, its potential to cause damage must be determined. When measuring the amount of radiation in the environment, what is actually being measured is the rate of radioactive decay, or **activity**. The rate of decay varies widely among the various radioisotopes. For that reason, 1 g of one radioactive substance may contain the same amount of activity as several tons of another substance. Activity is measured by the number of disintegrations a radioactive material undergoes in a certain period of time. In the United States, activity is expressed in a unit of measure known as a **curie (Ci)**. In the international system of units, activity is expressed in a unit of measure known as a **Becquerel (Bq)**. One disintegration per second (dps) equals one Becquerel (Bq).

One curie equals:

- 37,000,000,000 atom disintegrations per second (3.7×10^{10} dps).
- 37,000,000,000 Becquerels (3.7×10^{10} Bq)
- 1,000,000 microcuries (1×10^6 μ Ci)

DOSE INFORMATION

The total amount of energy absorbed per unit mass as a result of exposure to radiation is expressed in a unit of measure known as a **radiation absorbed dose (rad)**. In the international system of units, $100 \text{ rad} = 1 \text{ gray}$. However, in terms of human health, it is the effect of the absorbed energy that is important because some forms of radiation are more harmful than others. The unit, rad, does not take into account the potential effects that different types of radiation have on the body. The measure of potential biological damage caused by exposure to and subsequent absorption of radiation is expressed in a unit of measure known as a **Roentgen equivalent man (rem)**. One rem of any type of radiation has the same total damaging effect and pertains to the human body. Dose is expressed in millirems (mrem), because a rem represents a fairly large dose. One millirem is equal to $1/1000$ rem. The International System of Units uses the **Sievert (Sv)**, $100 \text{ rem} = 1 \text{ Sievert (Sv)}$, $100 \text{ mrem} = 1 \text{ millisievert (mSv)}$.

Many terms are used to report **dose**, as listed in **Table A.2**. Several factors are taken into account, including the amount of radiation absorbed, the organ absorbing the radiation, and the effect of the radiation over a 50-year period. The term “dose,” in this report, includes the committed effective dose equivalent (EDE) and the effective dose equivalent attributable to penetrating radiation from sources external to the body.

Determining dose is an involved process using complex mathematical equations based on several factors, including the type of radiation, the rate of exposure, weather conditions, and typical diet. Basically, radiant energy is generated from radioactive decay, or activity. People absorb some of the energy to which they are exposed. This absorbed energy is calculated as part of an individual’s dose. Whether radiation is natural or human made, its effects on people are the same.

A comparison of some dose levels is presented in **Table A.3**. Included is an example of the type of exposure that may cause such a dose or the special significance of such a dose. This information is intended to help the reader become familiar with the type of doses individuals may receive. The average annual dose received by residents of the United States from cosmic radiation is about 27 mrem (0.27 mSv) (NCRP 1987). The average annual dose from cosmic radiation received by residents in the Paducah area is about 45 mrem (0.45 mSv). The average annual dose received from terrestrial gamma radiation in the United States is about 28 mrem (0.28 mSv). The terrestrial dose varies geographically across the country (NCRP 1987); typical reported values are 16 mrem (0.16 mSv) at the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains and 63 mrem (0.63 mSv) at the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. In the Paducah area, background levels of radionuclides in soils are within typical levels indicating that the dose received from terrestrial gamma radiation is within the range of typical reported values (DOE 1997). The major contributors to the annual dose equivalent for internal radionuclides are the short-lived decay products of radon, mostly Rn-222. They contribute an average dose of about 200 mrem (2.00 mSv) per year. This dose estimate is based on an average radon concentration of about 1 pCi/L (0.037 Bq/L) (NCRP 1987). The average dose from

other internal radionuclides is about 39 mrem (0.39 mSv) per year, most of which can be attributed to the naturally occurring isotope of potassium, K-40. The concentration of radioactive potassium in human tissues is similar in all parts of the world. **Table A.4** presents the internal dose factors for an adult. The United States average annual dose received by an individual from consumer products is about 10 mrem (0.10 mSv) (NCRP 1987). The dose from medical sources include nuclear medicine examinations, which involve the internal administration of radiopharmaceuticals, and generally account for the largest portion of the dose received from human-made sources. However, the radionuclides used in specific tests are not distributed uniformly throughout the body. In these cases, comparisons are made using the concept of EDE, which relates exposure of organs or body parts to one effective whole-body dose. The average annual EDE from medical examinations is 53 mrem (0.53 mSv), including 39 mrem (0.39 mSv) for diagnostic X-rays and 14mrem (0.14mSv) for nuclear medicine procedures (NCRP 1989). The actual doses received by individuals who complete such medical exams are much higher than these values, but not everyone receives such exams each year (NCRP 1989). The dose from other sources include small doses received by individuals that occur as a result of radioactive fallout from atmospheric atomic weapons tests, emissions of radioactive materials

Table A.2 Dose terminology.

Term	Description
absorbed dose	quantity of radiation energy absorbed by an organ divided by an organ's mass
dose equivalent	absorbed dose to an organ multiplied by a quality factor
effective dose equivalent	single weighted sum of combined dose equivalents received by all organs
committed dose equivalent	effective dose equivalent to an organ over a 50-year period following intake
committed effective dose equivalent	total effective dose equivalent to all organs in the human body over a 50-year period following intake
collective effective dose equivalent	sum of effective dose equivalents of all members of a given population
quality factor	a modifying factor used to adjust for the effect of the type of radiation, for example, alpha particles or gamma rays, on tissue
weighting factor	tissue-specific modifying factor representing the fraction of the total health risk from uniform, whole-body exposure

from nuclear facilities, emissions from certain mineral extraction facilities, and transportation of radioactive materials. The combination of these sources contributes less than 1 mrem (0.01 mSv) per year to the average dose to an individual (NCRP 1987). A comprehensive EPA report of 1984

projected the average occupational dose to monitored radiation workers in medicine, industry, the nuclear fuel cycle, government, and miscellaneous industries to be 105 mrem (1.05 mSv) per year for 1985, down slightly from 110 mrem (1.10 mSv) per year in 1980 (EPA 1984).

Table A.3 Comparison and description of various dose levels

Dose level	Description
1 mrem (0.01 mSv)	Approximate daily dose from natural background radiation, including radon.
2.5 mrem (0.025 mSv)	Cosmic dose to a person on a one-way airplane flight from New York to Los Angeles.
10 mrem (0.10 mSv)	Annual exposure limit, set by the EPA for exposures from airborne emissions from operations of nuclear fuel cycle facilities, including power plants and uranium mines and mills
45 mrem (0.45 mSv)	Average yearly dose from cosmic radiation received by people in the Paducah area.
46 mrem (0.46 mSv)	Estimate of the largest dose any off-site person could have received from the March 28, 1979, Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident.
66 mrem (0.66 mSv)	Average yearly dose to people in the United States from human-made sources.
100 mrem (1.00 mSv)	Annual limit of dose from all DOE facilities to a member of the public who is not a radiation worker.
110 mrem (1.10 mSv)	Average occupational dose received by U.S. commercial radiation workers in 1980.
244 mrem (2.44 mSv)	Average dose from an upper gastrointestinal diagnostic X-ray series.
300 mrem (3.00 mSv)	Average yearly dose to people in the United States from all sources of natural background radiation.
1-5 rem (0.01-0.05 Sv)	EPA protective action guidelines state that public officials should take emergency action when the dose to a member of the public from a nuclear accident will likely reach this range.
5 rem (0.05 Sv)	Annual limit for occupational exposure of radiation workers set by NRC and DOE.
10 rem (0.10 Sv)	The BEIR V report estimated that an acute dose at this level would result in a lifetime excess risk of death from cancer, caused by the radiation, of 0.8% (BEIR 1990).
25 rem (0.25 Sv)	EPA guideline for voluntary maximum dose to emergency workers for non-lifesaving work during an emergency.
75 rem (0.75 Sv)	EPA guideline for maximum dose to emergency workers volunteering for lifesaving work.
50-600 rem (0.50-6.00 Sv)	Doses in this range received over a short period of time will produce radiation sickness in varying degrees. At the lower end of this range, people are expected to recover completely, given proper medical attention. At the top of this range, most people would die within 60 days.

Adapted from *Savannah River Site Environmental Report for 1993, Summary Pamphlet*, WSRC-TR-94-076, Westinghouse Savannah River Company, 1994.

Table A.4 Internal dose factors for an adult.

Isotope	Half-life (years)	Intake ^a (mrem/pCi)			
		Inhalation (soluble)	Inhalation (slightly soluble)	Inhalation (insoluble)	Ingestion
²³⁷ Np	2,100,000	NA	0.49	NA	0.0039
²³⁹ Pu	24,000	NA	0.51	0.33	0.0043
⁹⁹ Tc	210,000	0.00000084	0.0000075	0.12	0.0000013
²³⁰ Th	75,000	NA	0.32	0.26	0.00053
²³⁴ U	240,000	0.0027	0.0071	0.13	0.00026
²³⁵ U	710,000,000	0.0025	0.0067	0.12	0.00025
²³⁸ U	4,500,000,000	0.0024	0.0062	0.12	0.00023

^a Source: U.S. DOE. July 1988. *Internal Dose Conversion Factors for Calculations of Dose to the Public*, DOE/EH-0071.

NA = not available in the above-referenced document

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