



RADIATION *Fact Sheet*

Radioactivity in Common Products

National Park Service

This is one in a series of fact sheets that provide information about regulatory, technical, and other issues considered in decision-making for programs addressing sites potentially contaminated with radioactive materials. This fact sheet discusses how some common household products contain radioactivity.

Around the House

Many household products contain a small amount of radioactivity. Examples include gas lantern mantles, smoke detectors, dentures, camera lenses, and anti-static brushes. The radioactivity is added to the products either specifically to make them work, or as a result of using compounds of elements like thorium and uranium in producing them. The amount of radiation the products gives off is not considered significant. But with today's sensitive equipment, it can be detected.

Lanterns: In a New Light

About 20 million gas lantern mantles are used by campers each year in the United States.

Under today's standards, the amount of natural radioactivity found in a lantern mantle would require precautions in handling it at many Government or industry sites. The radioactivity present would contaminate 15 pounds of dirt to above allowable levels. This is because the average mantle contains 1/3 of a gram of thorium oxide, which has a specific activity (a measure of radioactivity) of approximately 100,000 picocuries per gram. The approximately 35,000 picocuries of radioactivity in the mantle would, if thrown onto the ground, be considered low-level radioactive contamination.

