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Radiation Exposure

One possible source of radiation exposure is a “dirty bomb”. A dirty bomb is a small explosive device packaged with radioactive materials. During any event that releases radiation, your best protection is to follow the recommendations of authorities.

Stay inside

- Stay inside your home or office unless instructed by civil authorities to leave. Close the windows, turn off the heating or air-conditioning, and stay near the center of the building. Once the initial blast is over, radioactive materials may be spread in the smoke and debris in the air. By staying inside you will reduce any potential exposure to airborne radioactive material. If there is a basement, go there.

Listen to the Radio

- When you learn that radioactive materials have been released in an area near you— either accidentally or intentionally—tune your radio to the emergency broadcasting network for instructions. Government agencies will let you know how to protect yourself. Keep a battery-powered radio handy in case electrical power goes out in your area.

Follow Instructions

- The best way to avoid exposure to radiation is to do what experts advise. If told to evacuate, do so promptly. Take items you will need for an extended absence, such as prescription medicines and clothing. Listen for news about the location of the radioactive cloud. Even if it has already passed, radioactive contamination may have fallen on the ground and experts will recommend the best ways to safely leave the area.

If you suspect that you are contaminated

- If you believe you have been exposed to radioactive materials, you should carefully remove your outer layer of clothing and put it in a plastic bag; then take a warm shower to rinse off any radioactive materials. Place the sealed plastic bag in a room away from people.

Seek help if needed

- Special assistance centers will be set up as soon as possible. Center locations will be made available through the media and on health department and other emergency service Web sites. If this information is not yet available, go to a police or fire station located outside of the affected area. If you were near the explosion or believe you were in the path of the cloud, tell the staff at the station or assistance center.

Watch what you eat

- Avoid drinking fresh milk or eating fruits and vegetables grown in the affected area. Wait until the Department of Health announces that produce and dairy products are safe to eat and drink. Milk, fruit and vegetables are okay to eat if they were bought or picked before the radiation was released and were stored indoors. Food stored in cans or bags is also safe to eat. Be sure to thoroughly rinse off containers before opening.