

NORM Sources and Their Origins

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The Discovery of Radioactivity

Naturally Occurring **R**adioactive **M**aterials, often referred to by the acronym **NORM**, are and always have been a part of our world. Our planet and its atmosphere contain many different naturally occurring radioactive species, and it and virtually everything, living or inanimate, contains NORM. In the history of mankind, knowledge of the existence of radioactivity is very recent, even when considered within the span of recorded history. Indeed, the discovery of radioactivity and hence NORM is barely a century old, dating back to the final years of the nineteenth century.

The discovery of radioactivity was sparked by the discovery of x-rays, which preceded it by only a few months. On November 8, 1895, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845-1923), a fifty year old professor of physics at the University of Würzburg in Germany made his insightful discovery of x-rays, a hitherto unknown form of radiation with startling properties including the ability to penetrate through solid matter, and to produce fluorescence in a variety of substances. After a number of weeks of study, Röntgen reported his discovery in the proceedings of the Würzburg Society for Physics and Medicine dated December 28, 1895 (Röntgen 1895).

USTUR-0064-97