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from the December 05, 2001 edition

Trafficking of nuclear material: significant incidents
Compiled by Staff
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1. Oct. 9, 1992

Russian police intercept 1.5 kilograms of highly enriched uranium at the train station in Podolsk. A worker at the Luch Scientific Production Association in the same city had taken the material.

2. May 1993

Approximately 100 grams of highly enriched uranium are discovered in a bank vault in Vilnius, Lithuania. The cache, originally from the Institute of Physics and Power Engineering in Obninsk, Russia, is embedded in a shipment of 4 metric tons of beryllium.

3. July 29, 1993

Russian security forces arrest two naval servicemen before they can smuggle 1.8 kilograms of highly enriched uranium out of the country. The servicemen stole the material from a storage facility on the naval base in Andreeva Guba, Russia.

4. March 1994

Russian agents in St. Petersburg arrest three people attempting to sell about 3 kilograms of highly enriched uranium. The material likely came from a machine-building plant in Elektrostal, Russia. Not much corroborating evidence of the incident is available.

5. May 10, 1994

As police in Tengen, Germany, investigate a businessman, they stumble upon about 6 grams of plutonium in his apartment. Its source is unconfirmed but is thought to possibly be a Soviet weapons lab at Arzamas-16, Russia.

6. June 1994

A naval officer at the Sevmorput Shipyard in Russia notifies authorities after a fellow officer asks about potential customers for nuclear material. The tip leads to the piecing together of a case involving two other officers and 4.5 kilograms of highly enriched uranium that had been stolen from the shipyard in 1993.

7. June 13, 1994

Undercover police in Landshut, Germany, act as potential customers in a sting operation involving the trade of 800 milligrams of highly enriched uranium. The material likely came from the Obninsk, Russia, institute. A Slovakian trader was convicted in the case.

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8. Aug. 10, 1994
- Undercover German police act as potential customers in a sting operation involving the trafficking of 560 grams of mixed oxide fuel and more than 360 grams of plutonium. The material, which likely came from the Obninsk, Russia, institute, was intercepted on a flight from Moscow to Munich. A Colombian national and two Spaniards were arrested.
9. Dec. 14, 1994
- An anonymous tip to Czech police indicates that highly enriched uranium is in a parked car in Prague. Police arrest a Russian trader, a Czech physicist, and a Belarusian. The 2.7 kilograms of material are likely from the Obninsk, Russia, institute.
10. June 8, 1995
- In a Moscow sting operation, Russian agents arrest three people trying to sell 1.7 kilograms of highly enriched uranium. One of the suspects is a worker in Elektrostal, Russia, where the material originated.
11. December 1997
- A Russian inspection team visits the I.N. Vekua Physics and Technology Institute in Sukhumi, Georgia, which had been closed as a result of the Abkhazia-Georgia conflict. About 2 kilograms of highly enriched uranium that had been counted in a 1992 inventory are missing. The material has not been recovered.
12. Dec. 17, 1998
- A Russian agency reports that it thwarted an attempt by workers at a nuclear facility in the Chelyabinsk Oblast region of Russia to steal 18.5 kilograms of uranium.
13. May 29, 1999
- Bulgarian customs officers in Dunav Most discover 10 grams of highly enriched uranium hidden in a car crossing into Turkey. The driver says he obtained the material in Moldova, although authorities haven't determined the source.
14. April 19, 2000
- Police in Batumi, Georgia, arrest four residents and seize 920 grams of highly enriched uranium. Its source is unknown.
- Source: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey
Institute of International Studies

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