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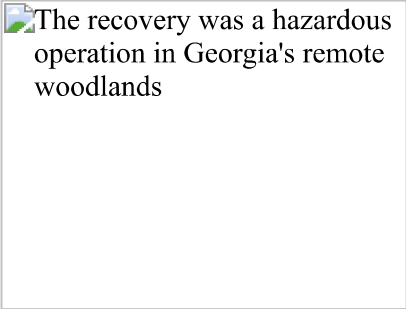
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Radioactive find alarms scientists

February 6, 2002 Posted: 5:27 AM EST (1027 GMT)



The recovery was a hazardous operation in Georgia's remote woodlands

By CNN's Matthew Chance

TBILISI, Georgia (CNN) -- Experts from the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog have been helping Georgian scientists transfer two radioactive devices, discovered in the remote west of the country, to a secure storage site in the capital, Tbilisi.

The incident has renewed fears, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, that nuclear material could fall into the hands of terrorists.

The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency team has had to trek through the snows of the remote Caucasus mountains to recover the devices.

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Wearing protective clothing, and using long metal tongs the two Soviet era radioactive batteries were plucked, steaming, from the bushes, and encased in lead.

Officials have declared this operation a success. But the possibility of more radioactive material turning up, that could be used to manufacture crude weapons, is not being ruled out.

VIDEO

Radiation finds sparks 'dirty nuke' fear (February 5)



Otar Taverashvili, Emergency Situations Minister, [Play video](#) (QuickTime, Real or Windows Media) said: "As for the existence of other sources of radiation, we have certain information about it and our authorities are checking this information and trying to locate these sources.

"If they find anything there will be a similar operation to isolate and secure them in a special place."

During the Cold War, Soviet and U.S. military forces both used radioactive batteries to power satellites in space, or remote communication equipment on the ground.

Leftovers are now believed to be scattered across the former Soviet Union.

It is not the kind of material that could easily be used to produce a nuclear explosion, but there is potential to contaminate large areas with radiation weapons, so-called "dirty nukes."

Military Analyst Pavel Felgenhauer said: "We are faced with terrorists ready to take action that no one would before.

"This is easy to do and the results would be devastating especially if used in a big city."

It was the injuries, radiation burns, caused by contact with the batteries that first alerted the authorities to the latest problem.

The devices -- which contain highly radioactive Strontium-90 -- were found by three local woodsmen, who used their glowing heat to keep warm.

Two are still in hospital. Officials say they are increasing their efforts to prevent similar materials falling into the wrong hands.

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