

India to install radiation monitors for steel scrap import at all major port

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India's ministry of shipping has decided to install Radiation Monitor Portals in all the major ports in the country by 2012.

Mr GK Vasan Indian minister of shipping in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha said that "Once the equipment are installed, all the consignments imported will be scanned for radioactive radiation."

He added that presently there are no equipments to scan the imported scrap for radiation.

During April 2010, the case of contamination of steel scrap with radioactive substance was the highlights of the media reflecting the ground realities in India and the dangers it poses to common man in terms of their chances of exposure to radioactive materials used in construction. The problem is compounded by non existent facilities to monitor quality of steel scrap.

Radioactive isotopes are used in many applications in medical equipments as well in industrial applications. Almost all factories have some kind of measuring instruments based on radioactive isotopes. Imagine a situation when a factory remains unused for 5 years to 10 years, or may be more, and is being dismantled. As the warning signs on radioactive isotope based equipments become invisible and could become part of steel scrap easily. The contaminated scrap, after melting normally takes shape of rebars, which are used in construction exposing common people to a great danger which by far remains undetected but takes it toll by inducing cancer among them.

It is in fact very difficult to detect such cases and only by chance they have been reported in past. In an unfortunate incident a whole building complex in Taiwan was found to have been contaminated with radioactivity due to such rebars and caused cancer to score of people living there. Some more incidents of contaminated steel products have been reported in past but unfortunately they were all discovered by chance only.

In India, the situation is even worse as there is absolutely no control on the quality of scrap being used in steel making because not only there is no awareness but any investment in this direction would make the steel maker uncompetitive. Small amounts of radioactive substance can always go un noticed and contaminate rebars used in general construction of houses and other structures exposing common man to unknown dangers of cancer.