

*** Name Origin:**

From Prometheus who stole the fire of the sky and gave it to mankind.

*** Sources:**

Does not occur naturally. Found among fission products of uranium, thorium, and plutonium.

*** Uses:**

Used in thickness gauges, photoelectric cells and hold potential as a heat source for auxiliary power in satellites.

*** Additional Notes:**

In 1902 Branner predicted the existence of an element between neodymium and samarium, and this was confirmed by Moseley in 1914. Unsuccessful searches were made for this predicted element over two decades, and various investigators proposed the names "illinium", "florentium", and "cyclonium" for this element. In 1941, workers at Ohio State University irradiated neodymium and praseodymium with neutrons, deuterons, and alpha particles, resp., and produced several new radioactivities, which most likely were those of element 61. Wu and Segre, and Bethe, in 1942, confirmed the formation; however, chemical proof of the production of element 61 was lacking because of the difficulty in separating the rare earths from each other at that time. In 1945, Marinsky, Glendenin, and Coryell made the first chemical identification by use of ionexchange chromatography. Their work was done by fission of uranium and by neutron bombardment of neodymium. These investigators named the newly discovered element. Searches for the element on earth have been fruitless, and it now appears that promethium is completely missing from the earth's crust. Promethium, however, has been reported to be in the spectrum of the star HR465 in Andromeda. This element is being formed recently near the star's surface, for no known isotope of promethium has a half-life longer than 17.7 years. Thirty five isotopes and isomers of promethium, with atomic masses from 130 to 158 are now known. Promethium-145, with a half-life of 17.7 years, is the most useful. Promethium-145 has a specific activity of 940 Ci/g. It is a soft beta emitter; although no gamma rays are emitted, X-radiation can be generated when beta particles impinge on elements of a high atomic number, and great care must be taken in handling it. Promethium salts luminesce in the dark with a pale blue or greenish glow, due to their high radioactivity. Ion-exchange methods led to the preparation of about 10 g of promethium from atomic reactor fuel processing wastes in early 1963. Little is yet generally known about the properties of metallic promethium. Two allotropic modifications exist. The element has applications as a beta source for thickness gages, and it can be absorbed by a phosphor to produce light. Light produced in this manner can be used for signs or signals that require dependable operation; it can be used as a nuclear-powered battery by capturing light in photocells which convert it into electric current. Such a battery, using ^{147}Pm , would have a useful life of about 5 years. It is being used for fluorescent lighting starter sand coatings for self-luminous watch dials. Promethium shows promise as a portable X-ray source, and it may become useful as a heat source to provide auxiliary power for space probes and satellites. More than 30 promethium compounds have been prepared. Most are colored. Promethium-147 is

available upon special order from the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, Idaho Falls, ID, or from the Westinghouse Hanford Co., Richland, WA.