

INTRODUCTION TO APPLICATIONS OF NUCLEAR PHYSICS

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Provide examples of various nuclear physics applications.



Figure 1: Tori Randall, Ph.D., curator for the Department of Physical Anthropology at the San Diego Museum of Man, prepares a 550-year-old Peruvian child mummy for a CT scan at Naval Medical Center San Diego. (credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Samantha A. Lewis)

Applications of nuclear physics have become an integral part of modern life. From the bone scan that detects a cancer to the radioiodine treatment that cures another, nuclear radiation has diagnostic and therapeutic effects on medicine. From the fission power reactor to the hope of controlled fusion, nuclear energy is now commonplace and is a part of our plans for the future. Yet, the destructive potential of nuclear weapons haunts us, as does the possibility of nuclear reactor accidents. Certainly, several applications of nuclear physics escape our view, as seen in [Figure 2]. Not only has nuclear physics revealed secrets of nature, it has an inevitable impact based on its applications, as they are intertwined with human values. Because of its potential

for alleviation of suffering, and its power as an ultimate destructor of life, nuclear physics is often viewed with ambivalence. But it provides perhaps the best example that applications can be good or evil, while knowledge itself is neither.



Figure 2: Customs officers inspect vehicles using neutron irradiation. Cars and trucks pass through portable x-ray machines that reveal their contents. (credit: Gerald L. Nino, CBP, U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security)

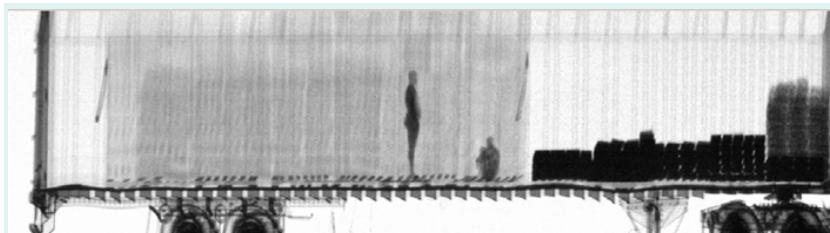


Figure 3: This image shows two stowaways caught illegally entering the United States from Canada. (credit: U.S. Customs and Border Protection)



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