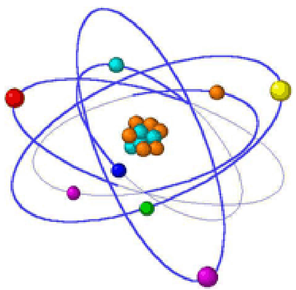
Radioisotope and Radiation Applications (FS2013)



Radiation Sources (Week 1b, 1st part)

Pavel Frajtag

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Radiation Sources: Outline

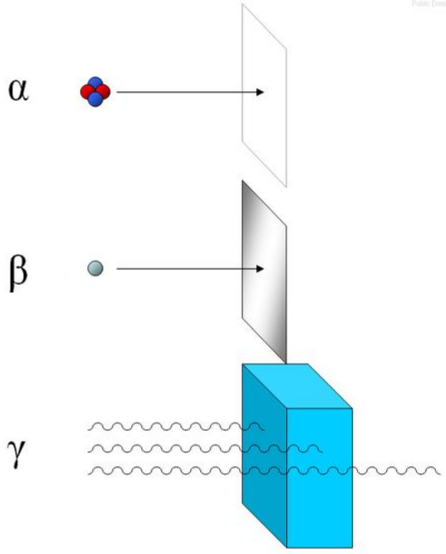
- Radiation Concepts
- Fast Electron Sources
  - Beta decay
  - Internal conversion
  - Auger electrons
- Heavy Charged Particle Sources
  - Alpha decay
  - Spontaneous fission
- Electromagnetic Radiation (EMR) Sources
  - Gamma rays
  - X-rays, characteristic X-rays
- Neutron Sources
  - Spontaneous fission
  - Neutrons from (α,n)-reactions
  - Photoneutrons
  - Accelerated charged particles

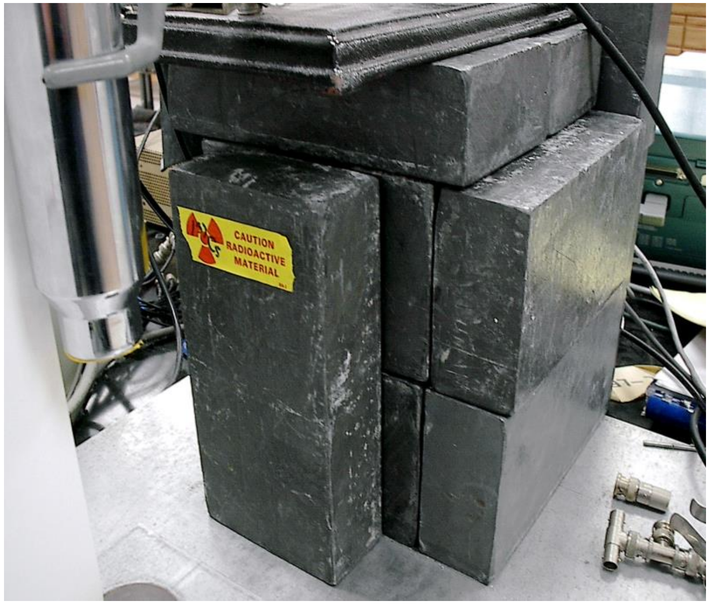
Radiation Concepts (1)

- There are four general types of radiation generated in nuclear and atomic processes:
  - **Charged particulate radiation:**
    - Fast electrons: β^+ and β^- from nuclear decay, energetic electrons.
    - Heavy charged particles: all energetic ions with A ≥1 (p^+, α^{2+}, fission products, nuclear reaction products)
  - **Uncharged radiation:**
    - Electromagnetic radiation: photons, X-rays (from electron transitions between atomic shells), γ rays (from nuclear transitions)
    - Neutrons: slow and fast (generated in nuclear reactions.)
- (Modes of radioactive decay were already discussed in the last lecture.)
- Absolute activity is defined as rate of decay: It measures the source disintegration rate, not the emission rate of radiation.

Radiation Concepts (2): “Hardness“

- Energy range of ionizing radiation:
  - 10 eV: minimum energy for ionization of typical materials.
  - to 20 MeV: upper bound for practical applications.
- Hard radiation:
  - High penetrating power.
  - Sources are less affected by self-absorption.
  - γ-rays, hard X-rays or neutrons.
- Soft radiation:
  - Highly ionizing
  - Low penetrating power
  - Sources must be thin to minimize self-absorption.
  - Charged particles, soft X-rays.





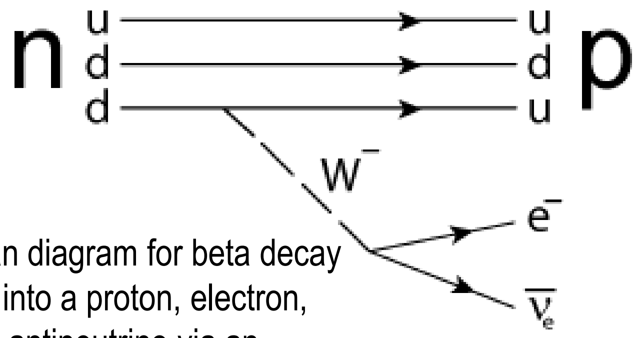
Fast Electron Sources: Beta Decay (1)

- Radioactive decay in which a beta particle (electron or positron) is emitted.
  - electron emission: "beta minus" (β^-),

$$n^0 \rightarrow p^+ + e^- + \bar{\nu}_e \qquad {}^{A}_{Z}X \rightarrow {}^{\;\;A}_{Z+1}Y + \beta^- + \bar{\nu}_e$$

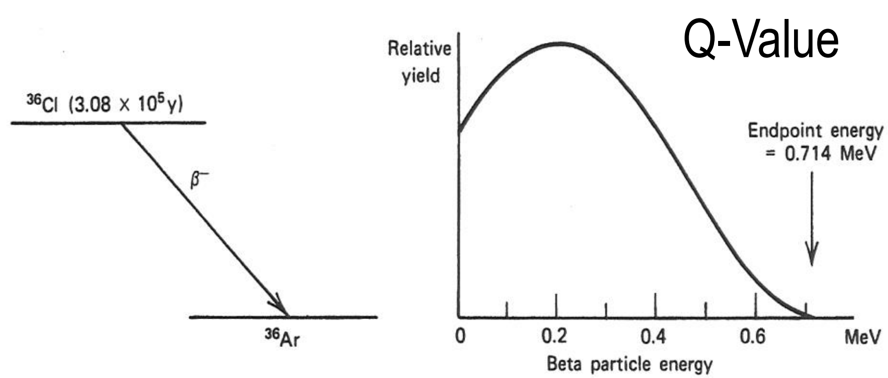
  - positron emission: "beta plus" (β^+).

$$Energy + p^+ \rightarrow n^0 + e^+ + \nu_e \qquad {}^{A}_{Z}X \rightarrow {}^{\;\;A}_{Z-1}Y + \beta^+ + \nu_e$$



The Feynman diagram for beta decay of a neutron into a proton, electron, and electron-antineutrino via an intermediate heavy W-boson.

- Beta plus decay cannot occur in isolation:
  - Neutron mass m_n is greater than m_p.
  - Inside nuclei when the absolute value of the binding energy of the daughter nucleus is higher than that of the mother nucleus.
  - The difference of these energies goes into:
    - the process of converting a proton into a neutron,
    - the positron and the neutrino, and into
    - the kinetic energy of these particles.



The decay scheme of ^{36}Cl and the resulting beta particle energy distribution.

Fast Electron Sources: Beta Decay (2)

- (Artificial) beta emitters can be produced by neutron irradiation of stable materials in nuclear reactors or high neutron flux facilities.
- As most beta decays populate an excited state of the daughter nucleus, they are not "pure", i.e., they are accompanied by γ-rays.
- Examples for beta decays:
  - Beta minus:

$$^{137}_{55}\mathrm{Cs} \rightarrow {}^{137}_{56}\mathrm{Ba} + \mathrm{e}^- + \bar{\nu}_e$$

  - Beta plus:

$$^{22}_{11}\mathrm{Na} \rightarrow {}^{22}_{10}\mathrm{Ne} + \mathrm{e}^+ + \nu_e$$

  - Electron capture:

$$^{22}_{11}\mathrm{Na} + \mathrm{e}^- \rightarrow {}^{22}_{10}\mathrm{Ne} + \nu_e$$

Some "Pure" Beta-Minus Sources

Nuclide	Half-Life	Endpoint Energy (MeV)
^{3}H	12.26 y	0.0186
^{14}C	5730 y	0.156
^{32}P	14.28 d	1.710
^{33}P	24.4 d	0.248
^{35}S	87.9 d	0.167
^{36}Cl	3.08×10^5 y	0.714
^{45}Ca	165 d	0.252
^{63}Ni	92 y	0.067
^{90}Sr/^{90}Y	27.7 y/64 h	0.546/2.27
^{99}Tc	2.12×10^5 y	0.292
^{147}Pm	2.62 y	0.224
^{204}Tl	3.81 y	0.766

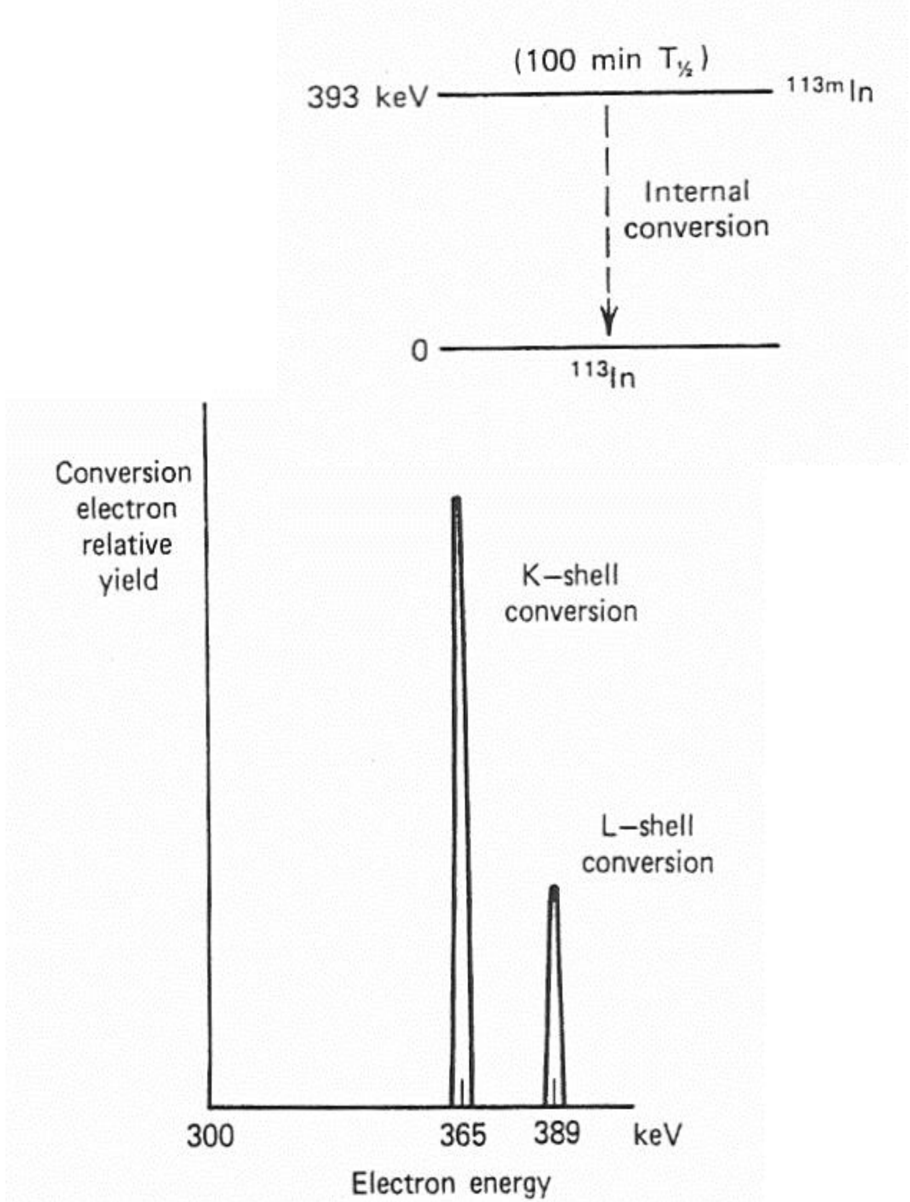
Data from Lederer and Shirley.[1]

Fast Electron Sources: Internal Conversion (1)

- Source of nearly monoenergetic electrons:

$$E_{e^-} = E_{ex} - E_b$$

- Process:
  - Alternative to de-excitation of an excited nuclear state by emission of a γ-ray photon.
  - Nuclear excitation energy E_{ex} is transferred to an orbital electron.
  - Discrete energies represent transitions between atomic energy levels (shells).
  - A single excited atom can lead to several groups of electrons with different energies.
  - Sometimes sources have superimposed the β-spectrum of the parent nucleus.



Fast Electron Sources: Internal Conversion (2)

Some Common Conversion Electron Sources

Parent Nuclide	Parent Half-Life	Decay Mode	Decay Product	Transition Energy of Decay Product (keV)	Conversion Electron Energy (keV)
^{109}Cd	453 d	EC	^{109m}Ag	88	62 84
^{113}Sn	115 d	EC	^{113m}In	393	365 389
^{137}Cs	30.2 y	β^-	^{137m}Ba	662	624 656
^{139}Ce	137 d	EC	^{139m}La	166	126 159
^{207}Bi	38 y	EC	^{207m}Pb	570 1064	482 554 976 1048

Data from Lederer and Shirley.[1]

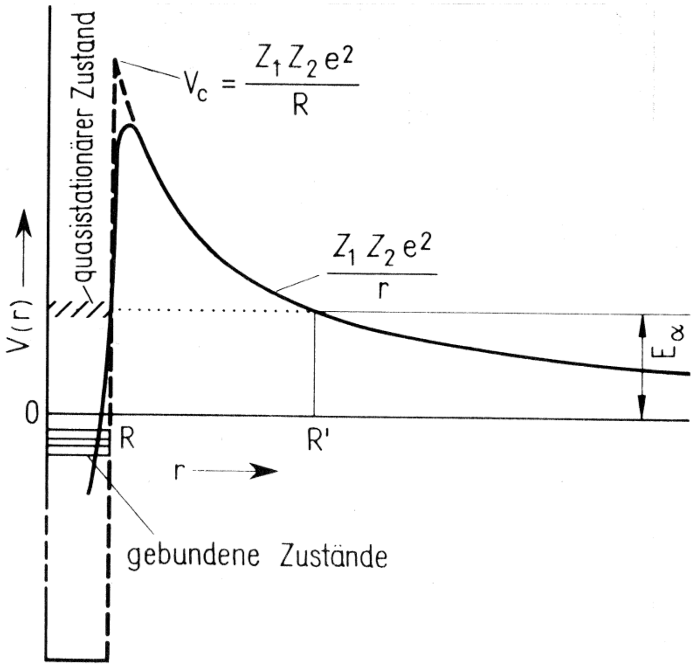
Conversion electrons are the **only practical laboratory-size source** of monoenergetic electron groups **in the high keV to MeV** energy range.

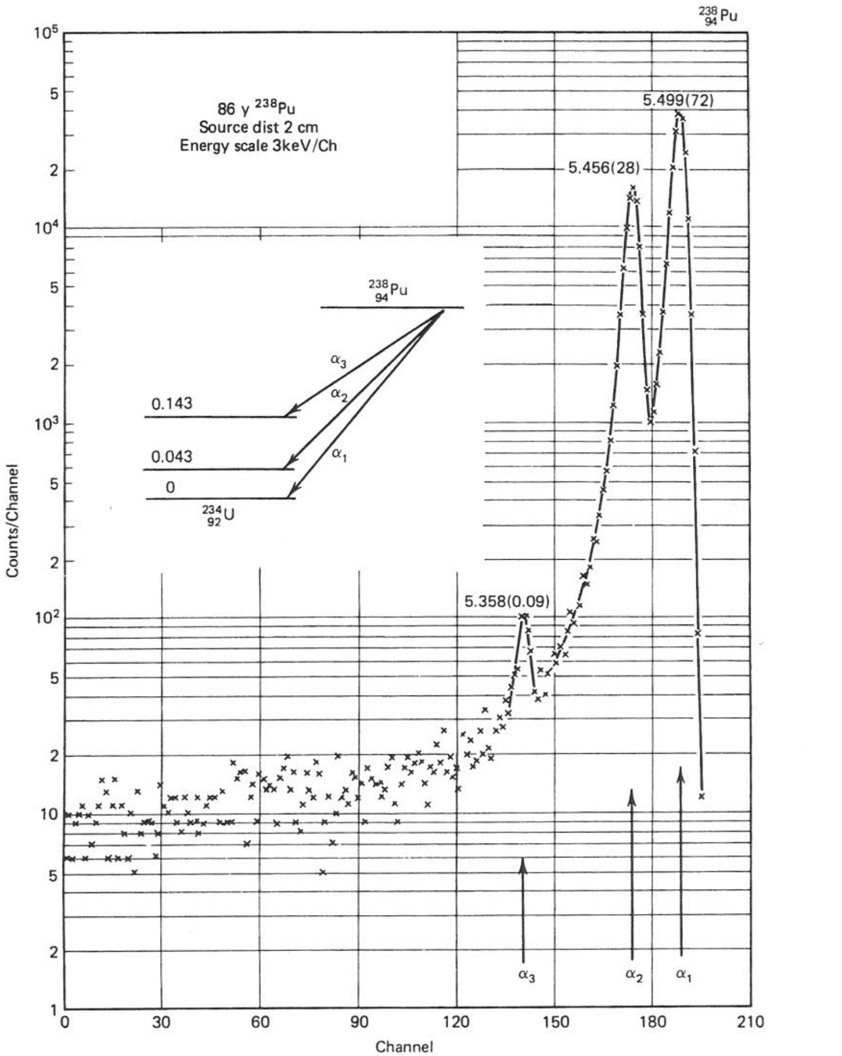
Fast Electron Sources: Auger Electrons

- Auger-effect: binding energy from creating a hole in an inner atomic shell is transferred to another e^- (interaction due to overlap of e^- wave functions). (Analogue of internal conversion electrons when the excitation energy originates in the atom.)
- Process:
  - Creation of a vacancy in one of the atomic shells.
  - The excitation energy is transferred to one of the outer electrons and it is ejected from the atom: **Auger Electron**.
  - Low energy compared to β decay and conversion electrons: few keV, because:
  - Favored only in low-Z elements: low binding energy.
  - Subjected to pronounced self-absorption within the source and easily stopped by very thin source covers or detector entrance windows.

Heavy Charged Particle Sources: Alpha Decay (1)

- That is decay by emission of an alpha particle (or ^{4}He nucleus): $${}^{A}_{Z}X \rightarrow {}^{A-4}_{Z-2}Y + {}^{4}_{2}\alpha$$
- Alpha decay can be described in the framework of Quantum Mechanics: penetration through a potential barrier (tunneling).
- Probability of emission increases with the energy of the alpha particle E_α (~e^{-G}, G=Gamow-Factor).





Alpha particle groups produced in the decay of ^{238}Pu. The pulse height spectrum shows the three groups as measured by a silicon surface barrier detector. Each peak is identified by its energy in MeV and percent abundance (in parentheses). The insert shows the decay scheme, with energy levels in the product nucleus labeled in MeV. (Spectrum from Chanda and Deal.[2])

Heavy Charged Particle Sources: Alpha Decay (2)

- Each α particle shares the energy with the recoil nucleus in a unique way (Q=Q-value of the decay):

$$E_\alpha = Q\,(A - 4)/A$$

- Alpha particles appear in one or more (essentially) monoenergetic energy groups.
- Typical kinetic energy E_α ~ 5 MeV with a speed of 15,000 km/s.
- **Alpha particles are among the most hazardous forms of internal radiation:**
  - Energy loss takes place within a very short distance.
  - Significant damage to surrounding biomolecules.
- External alpha irradiation is not harmful:
  - Completely absorbed by a very thin (μm) dead layer of skin as well as by a few centimeters of air.

Common Alpha-Emitting Radioisotope Sources

Source	Half-Life	Alpha Particle Kinetic Energy (with Uncertainty) in MeV		Percent Branching
^{148}Gd	93 y	3.182787	±0.000024	100
^{232}Th	1.4×10^{10} y	4.012	±0.005	77
		3.953	±0.008	23
^{238}U	4.5×10^{9} y	4.196	±0.004	77
		4.149	±0.005	23
^{235}U	7.1×10^{8} y	4.598	±0.002	4.6
		4.401	±0.002	56
		4.374	±0.002	6
		4.365	±0.002	12
		4.219	±0.002	6
^{236}U	2.4×10^{7} y	4.494	±0.003	74
		4.445	±0.005	26
^{230}Th	7.7×10^{4} y	4.6875	±0.0015	76.3
		4.6210	±0.0015	23.4
^{234}U	2.5×10^{5} y	4.7739	±0.0009	72
		4.7220	±0.0009	28
^{231}Pa	3.2×10^{4} y	5.0590	±0.0008	11
		5.0297	±0.0008	20
		5.0141	±0.0008	25.4
		4.9517	±0.0008	22.8
^{239}Pu	2.4×10^{4} y	5.1554	±0.0007	73.3
		5.1429	±0.0008	15.1
		5.1046	±0.0008	11.5
^{240}Pu	6.5×10^{3} y	5.16830	±0.00015	76
		5.12382	±0.00023	24
^{243}Am	7.4×10^{3} y	5.2754	±0.0010	87.4
		5.2335	±0.0010	11
^{210}Po	138 d	5.30451	±0.00007	99+
^{241}Am	433 y	5.48574	±0.00012	85.2
		5.44298	±0.00013	12.8
^{238}Pu	88 y	5.49921	±0.00020	71.1
		5.4565	±0.0004	28.7
^{244}Cm	18 y	5.80496	±0.00005	76.4
		5.762835	±0.000030	23.6
^{243}Cm	30 y	6.067	±0.003	1.5
		5.992	±0.002	5.7
		5.7847	±0.0009	73.2
		5.7415	±0.0009	11.5
^{242}Cm	163 d	6.11292	±0.00008	74
		6.06963	±0.00012	26
^{254m}Es	276 d	6.4288	±0.0015	93
^{253}Es	20.5 d	6.63273	±0.00005	90
		6.5916	±0.0002	6.6

Data from Rytz.[3]

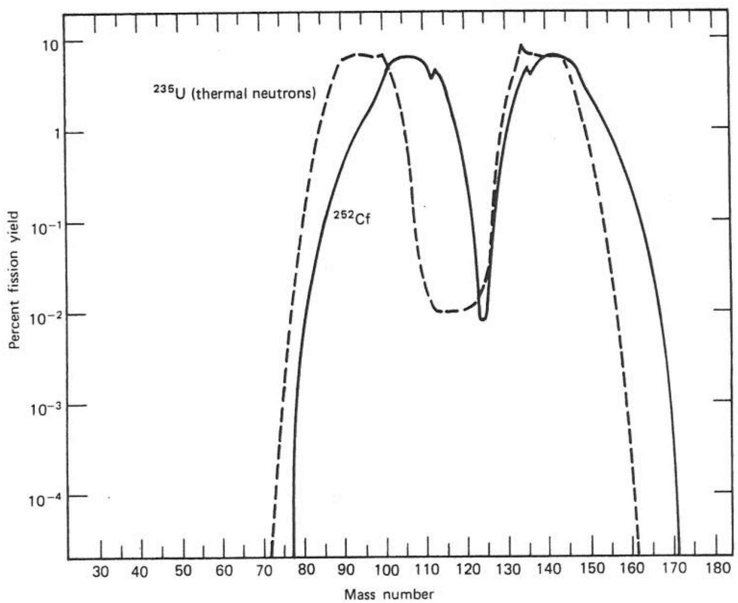
Heavy Charged Particles: Spontaneous Fission (1)

- Form of radioactive decay characteristic of very heavy isotopes.
- Theoretically possible for any atomic nucleus with A > 100 (near Ruthenium, Ru).
- Spontaneous fission is only energetically feasible for A > 230 (near Thorium, Th).
  - Most susceptible: high-Z actinide elements such as Mendelevium (Md), Lawrencium (Lr), and the trans-actinide elements, such as Rutherfordium (Rf).
- The criterion for spontaneous fission to occur is approximately:

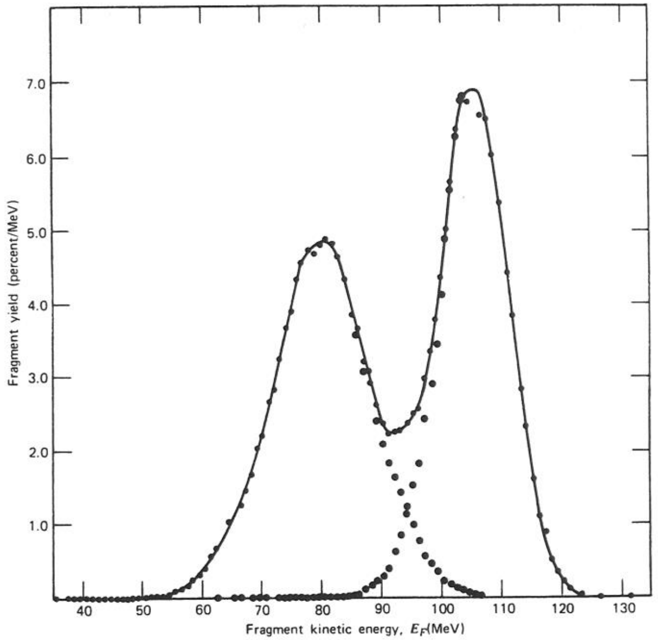
$$\frac{Z^2}{A} \geq 45$$

- It follows the exact same process as nuclear fission:
  - It releases neutrons as all fissions do, so if a critical mass is present, a spontaneous fission can initiate a chain reaction.
- Also, radioisotopes for which spontaneous fission is a non-negligible decay mode may be used as neutron sources: e.g. ^{252}Cf (half-life 2.645 years, SF branching ratio 3.09%). Applied to:
  - inspect airline luggage for hidden explosives,
  - to gauge the moisture content of soil in road construction and building industries,
  - to measure the moisture of materials stored in silos, etc.

Heavy Charged Particles: Spontaneous Fission (2)



The mass distribution of ^{252}Cf spontaneous fission fragments. Also shown is the corresponding distribution from fission of ^{235}U induced by thermal neutrons. (From Nervik.[4])



The distribution in kinetic energy of the ^{252}Cf spontaneous fission fragments. The peak on the left corresponds to the heavy fragments, and that on the right to the light fragments. (From Whetstone.[5])

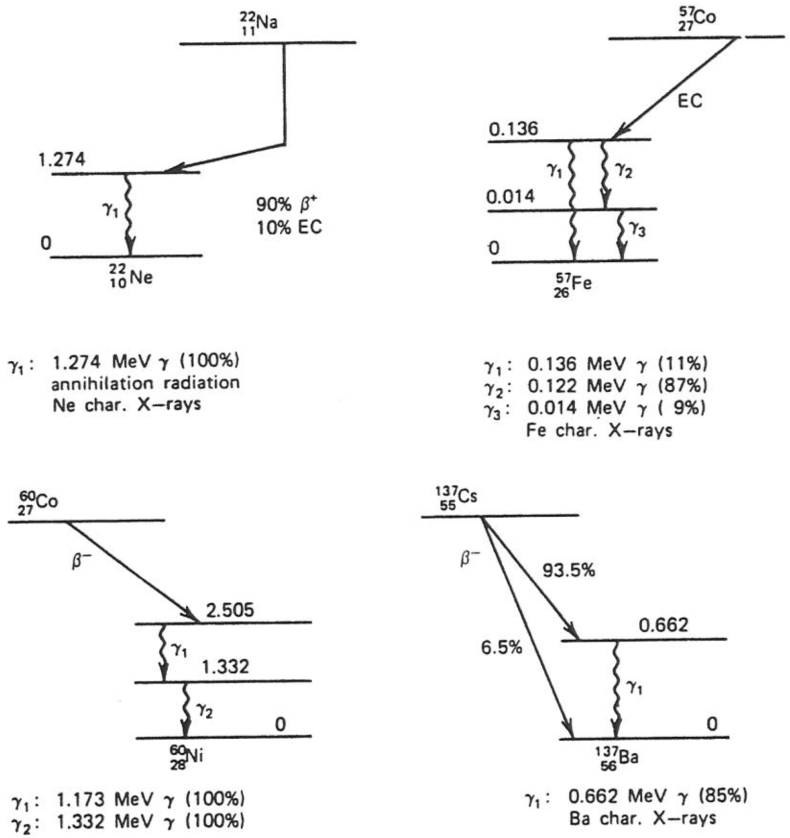
- ❑ Fission fragments are medium-weight positive ions.
- ❑ Fission is generally asymmetric: clustering into light (A~108) and heavy (A~143) groups.
- ❑ Initial charge approaches Z of the fragment and is reduced by interaction with the material.

- ❑ Energy shared by the two fragments: ~185 MeV.
- ❑ Asymmetric distribution of kinetic energy: light fragments receive the largest.
- ❑ Sources must be thin to overcome self-absorption.

EMR: Gamma Rays (following β-decay) (1)

- Emitted in the transition to lower energy levels in a nucleus.
- Excited nuclei are produced by decay of a parent radionuclide:
  - Beta-decay leads to excited nucleus (parent half-life).
  - Energy is emitted as γ-photons (half-life ~ps).
  - The energy level structure reflects that of the daughter nucleus.
  - The γ-emission half-life is that of the parent nucleus.

Energy of photon = $\Delta E_{excited\text{-}final}$



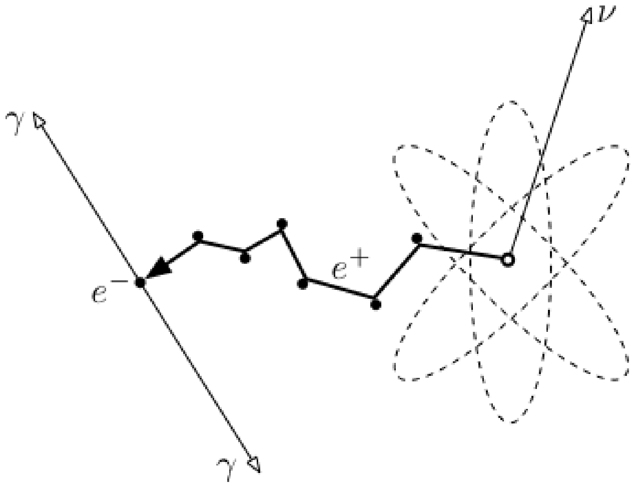
Decay schemes for some common gamma reference sources. Only major transitions are shown. The energies and yields per disintegration of X- and gamma rays emitted in each decay are listed below the diagram. (Data from Lederer and Shirley.[1])

EMR: Gamma Rays (following β-decay) (2)

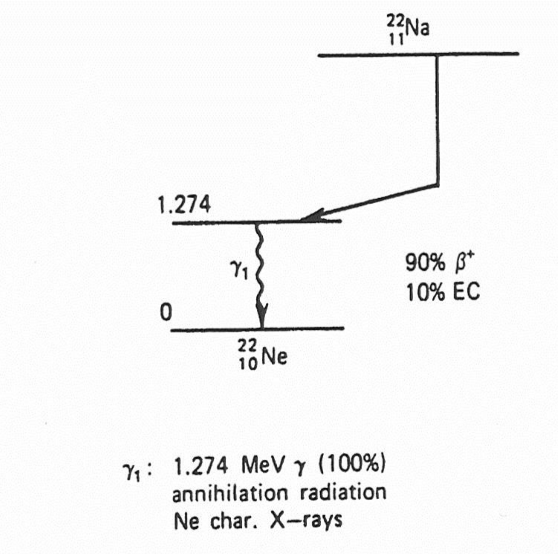
- Nuclear states have very well defined energies:
  - γ-rays emitted have well defined energies with very narrow peaks (nearly monoenergetic), $E_\gamma = E_i - E_f$.
  - Can be used for detector calibration.
- Gamma reference sources are essential in radiation measurement laboratories:
  - They consist of samples of β-emitters of a few μCi (~10^5 Bq).
  - Encased in plastic disks or rods and encapsulated to stop particulate radiation.
  - Secondary radiation, annihilation photons (next slide) or Bremsstrahlung can be significant.
  - Radiation hazard is minimal due to low absolute activity.
- Energy is limited to about 2.8 MeV. Higher energies from:
  - ^{56}Co (3.55 MeV, half-life 77 days)
  - ^{16}N (6.13 and 7.11 MeV, half-life 7 s).

EMR: Gamma Rays from Annihilation Radiation

- Produced in nuclei undergoing β^+-decay.
- The positrons travel only a few millimetres before being stopped and annihilated by matter-antimatter interaction.
- This radiation is super-imposed on any gamma radiation emitted in the decay of the daughter nucleus.



$$e^+ + e^- \rightarrow 2\gamma\,(m_e c^2 = 0.511\,\mathrm{MeV})$$



EMR: Gamma Rays from Nuclear Reactions

- High energy γ-rays can be produced from nuclear energy transitions of higher-lying nuclear states.
- Nuclear reactions provide the needed high energy excited states.
- Reactions used:
  - Alpha absorption:

$$^{4}_{2}\alpha + ^{9}_{4}\mathrm{Be} \rightarrow ^{12}_{6}\mathrm{C}^{*} + ^{1}_{0}\mathrm{n} \xrightarrow{61\,\mathrm{fs}} ^{12}_{6}\mathrm{C} + \gamma(4.44\,\mathrm{MeV})$$

Doppler broadening, 0.59 γ/n

$$^{4}_{2}\alpha + ^{13}_{6}\mathrm{C} \rightarrow ^{16}_{8}\mathrm{O}^{*} + ^{1}_{0}\mathrm{n} \xrightarrow{20\,\mathrm{ps}} ^{16}_{8}\mathrm{O} + \gamma(6.130\,\mathrm{MeV})$$

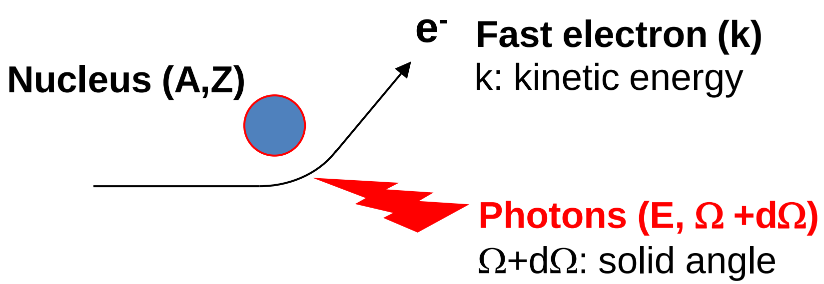
No Doppler broadening

Sources are a combination of an α-emitter and the target material. Large α-yields must be used for practical intensities: e.g. $6 \cdot 10^{9}$ Bq of $^{238}PuO_2$ and 200mg of ^{13}C give a source of 770 photons/s of 6.130 MeV γ-rays.

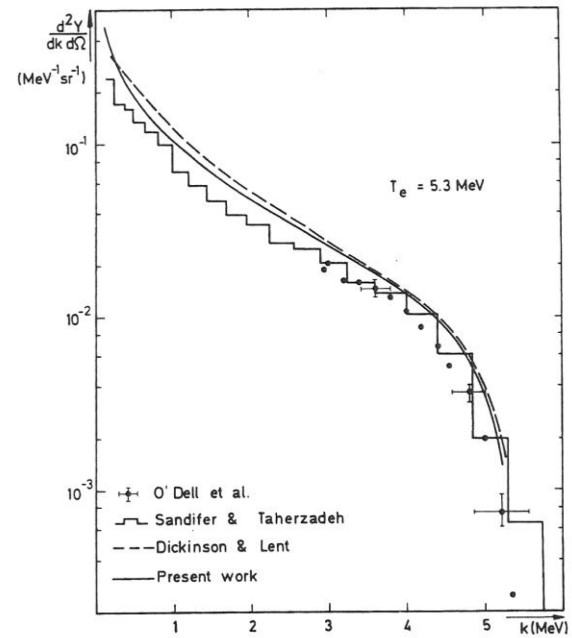
  - γ-rays from absorption of thermal neutrons (radiative neutron-capture):
    - Intense flux from nuclear reactors or accelerator facilities.
    - Weaker fluxes from radioisotope sources of neutrons.
    - Gamma energies as high as 9 MeV.

EMR: X-Rays from Bremsstrahlung (1)

- Bremsstrahlung is the process of producing electromagnetic radiation by the acceleration of a charged particle, such as an electron, when deflected by another charged particle, such as an atomic nucleus.
- Bremsstrahlung has a continuous spectrum:
  - The fraction of e⁻ energy converted into Bremsstrahlung increases with the electron energy and target Z.
  - The average photon energy is a small fraction of the incident electron energy k.
  - Bremsstrahlung cannot be directly used for calibration of detectors.



Spectrum produced by monoenergetic electrons

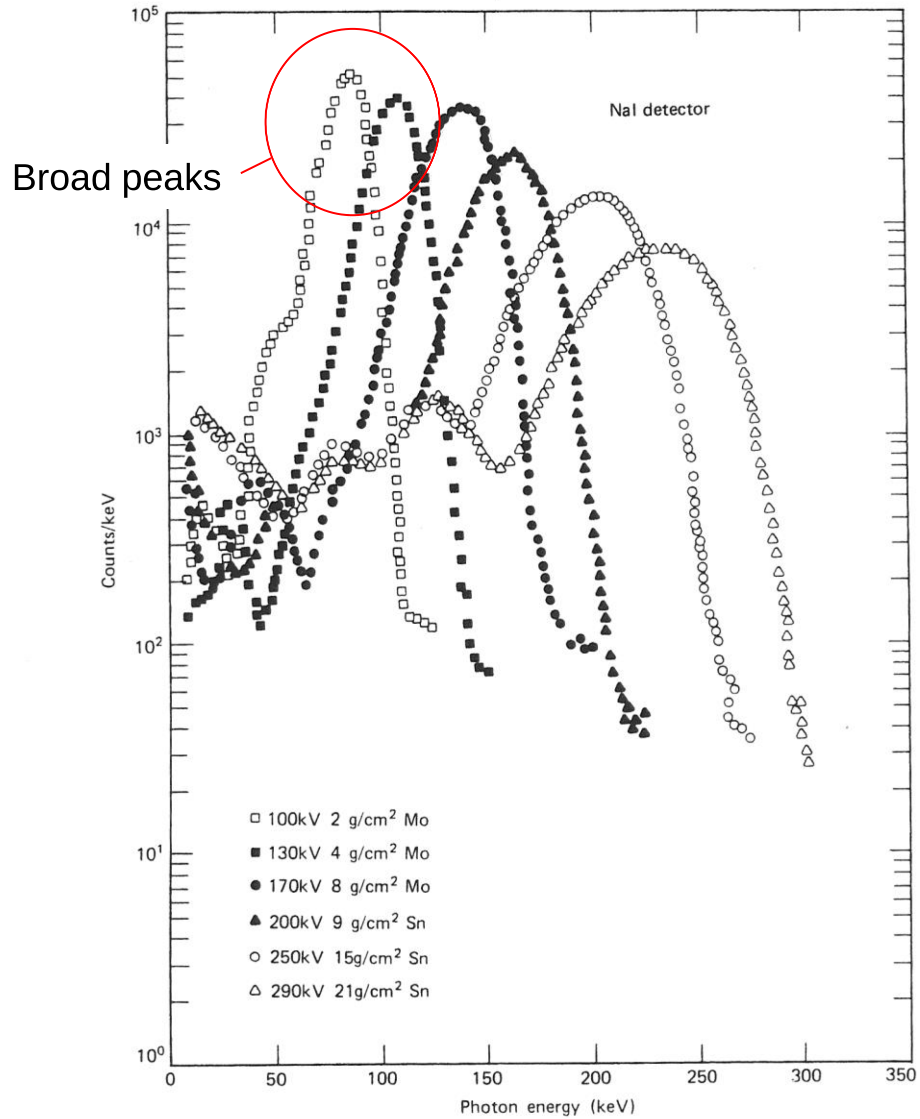


The bremsstrahlung energy spectrum emitted in the forward direction by 5.3 MeV electrons incident on a Au-W target. A 7.72 g/cm^2 aluminum filter also was present. (From Ferdinande et al.[14])

EMR: X-Rays from Bremsstrahlung (2)

- Bremsstrahlung is used to produce X-rays from conventional X-ray tubes.
  - Continuous spectrum altered by:
    - Filtration with absorber materials.
    - Peaked spectrum can be created by removing lower energy photons.
    - Can be used for calibration of detectors whose response changes only gradually with energy.

- Bremsstrahlung also produced by:
  - β-emitters interacting with shielding.
  - Changes in nucleus electric field during β-decay.



Examples of measured pulse height spectra [using a NaI(Tl) scintillator] after filtration of an X-ray tube output using the indicated absorbers and tube voltages. (From Storm et al.[15])

EMR: Characteristic X-Rays (1)

- X-Rays come from the re-arrangement of orbital electrons from excited atomic energy levels to ground states.
- Characteristic X-ray series depending on the shell with the vacancies.
- K-series is the most energetic, energy grows with Z:
  - Na (Z=11) 1 keV,
  - Ga (Z=31) 10 keV,
  - Ra (Z=88) 100 keV.
- The energy of the characteristic X-rays is unique. They can be used for element analysis.
- Auger electron emission competes with characteristic X-ray emission.
- Fluorescent yield: fraction of all cases in which the atom emits a characteristic X-ray photon in its de-excitation.

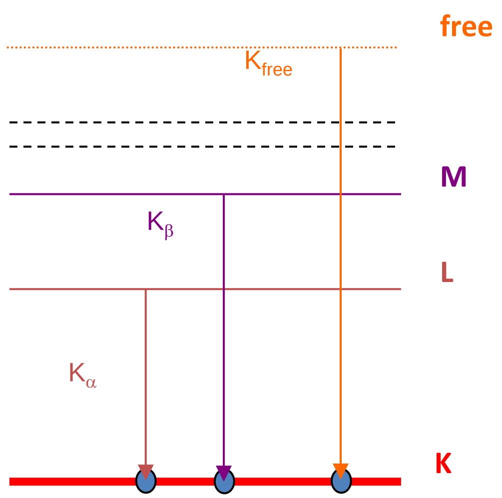
Energies in the K-series:

$$E_{K_\alpha} = E_L - E_K$$

$$E_{K_\beta} = E_M - E_K$$

$$\vdots$$

$$E_{K\,\max} = E_{free} - E_K = K_{\text{Binding Energy}}$$



K-series of X-rays

EMR: Characteristic X-Rays (2)

- **Excitation by Electron Capture:** $p^{+} + e^{-} \rightarrow n + \nu_e$
  - Nuclear electron capture from a K-shell electron creates a vacancy.
  - The daughter atom is still neutral (Z-1), but a hole exists in on of the inner shells.
  - The hole is filled by upper-shell electrons and gives a characteristic X-ray spectrum.

- **Excitation by Internal Conversion:**
  - K-electrons are the most readily converted: the K-series is the most prominent.
  - Gamma-ray de-excitation competes with this process, thus the K X-rays are produced together with γ-photons.
  - If the energy of the converted electrons is high, Bremsstrahlung is also possible.

EMR: Characteristic X-Rays (3)

Some Radioisotope Sources of Low-Energy X-Rays

Nuclide	Half-Life	Weighted K_α X-Ray Energy	Fluorescent Yield	Other Radiations
^{37}Ar	35.1 d	2.957 keV	0.086	Some IB[a]
^{41}Ca	8×10^4 y	3.690	0.129	Pure
^{44}Ti	48 y	4.508	0.174	γ Rays at 68 and 78 keV
^{49}V	330 d	4.949	0.200	IB
^{55}Fe	2.60 y	5.895	0.282	Weak IB

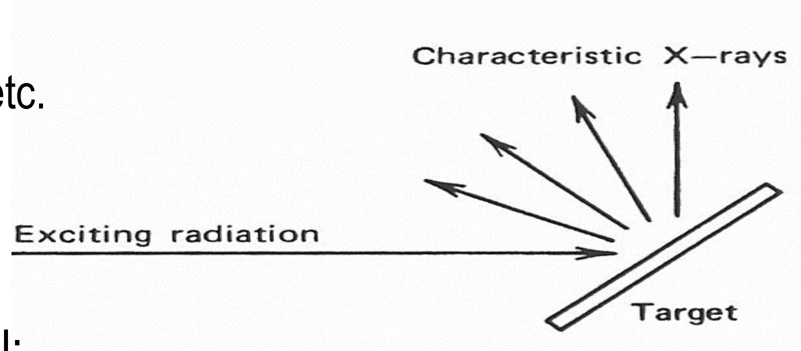
[a]IB represents inner bremsstrahlung.

Data from Amlauer and Tuohy.[17]

- The yield of high-energy γ-rays from nuclear transitions is large compared to the characteristic Xrays.
- A pure X-ray source needs a radioisotope that decays by electron capture leading directly to a ground nuclear state of the daughter.
- ^{55}Fe is the most used because of its half-life and specific activity, and its nearly pure source of Kseries of Mn at 5.9 keV, with very little Bremsstrahlung.
- Sources must be thin to prevent self-absorption of X-rays and have a high specific activity.

EMR: Characteristic X-Rays (4)

- Excitation by **external radiation:**
  - external sources of radiation used are: X-rays, e⁻, a, etc.
  - The radiation excites the parent atom which emits characteristic X-rays (isotropically).

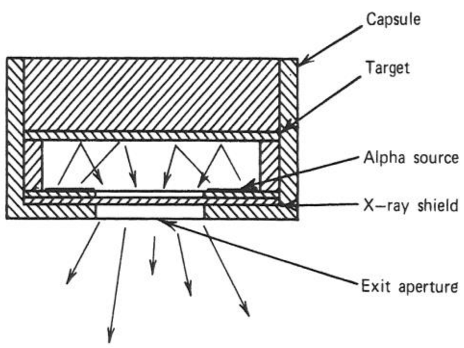


- The energy of X-rays depends on the target material: Low Z —> soft X-rays; High Z —> hard X-rays.

Alpha Particle Sources Useful for Excitation of Characteristic X-rays

	^{210}Po	^{244}Cm
Half-life	138 d	17.6 y
Alpha emissions	5.305 MeV (100%)	5.81, 5.77 MeV
Gamma-rays	803 keV (0.0011%)	43 keV (0.02%) 100 keV (0.0015%) 150 keV (0.0013%) 262 keV (1.4×10^{-4} %) 590 keV (2.5×10^{-4} %) 820 keV (7×10^{-5} %)
X-rays	Pb characteristic *L* and *M* (trace)	Pu characteristic *L* and *M*

Data from Amlauer and Tuohy.[17]



Compact source of characteristic X-rays with a-particle excitation.

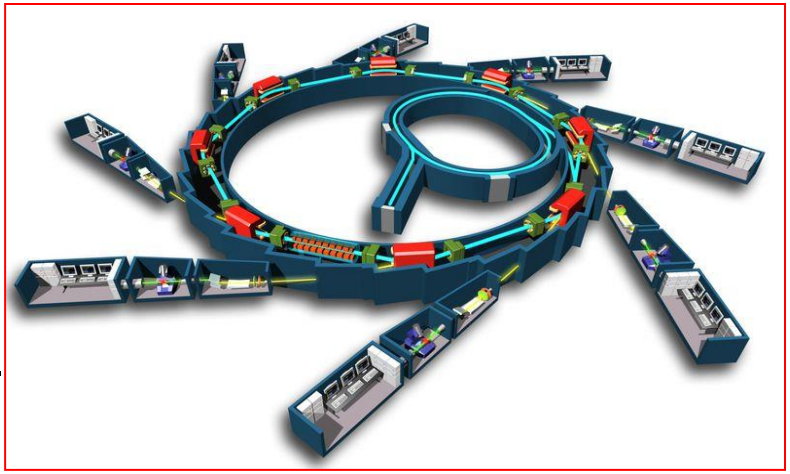
EMR: Synchrotron Radiation

Synchrotron radiation is electromagnetic radiation:

- Generated by the acceleration of ***ultrarelativistic*** electrons through magnetic fields.
- Artificially by storage rings in a Synchrotron, or naturally by fast electrons moving through magnetic fields in space.
- The radiation spectrum typically spans from infrared (few eV) to X-rays (10 keV).

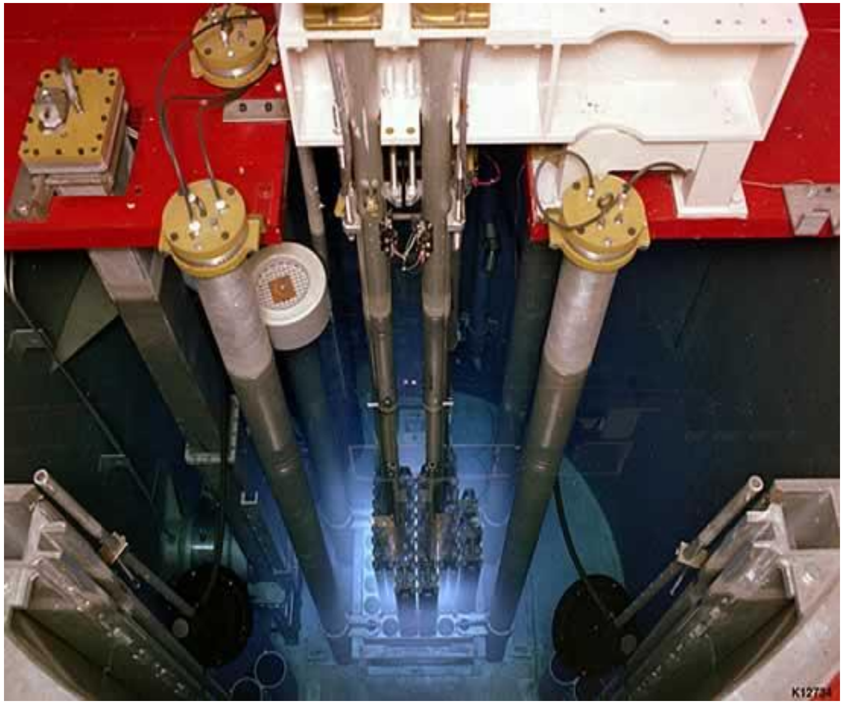
Characteristics:

- High brightness and intensity, many orders of magnitude more than with X-rays produced in conventional X-ray tubes.
- High brilliance, exceeding other natural and artificial light sources by many orders of magnitude: 3rd generation sources typically have a brilliance larger than 10^{18} photons/s/mm^2/mrad^2/0.1%BW, where 0.1%BW denotes a bandwidth $10^{-3}\omega$ centered around the frequency ω.
- High collimation, i.e. small angular divergence of beam.
- Low emittance, i.e. the product of source cross section and solid angle of emission is small.
- Wide tunability in energy/wavelength by monochromatization (sub eV up to the MeV range).
- High level of polarization (linear or elliptical) .
- Pulsed light emission (pulse durations at or below 1 ns).
- See, e.g., http://www.psi.ch/sls/

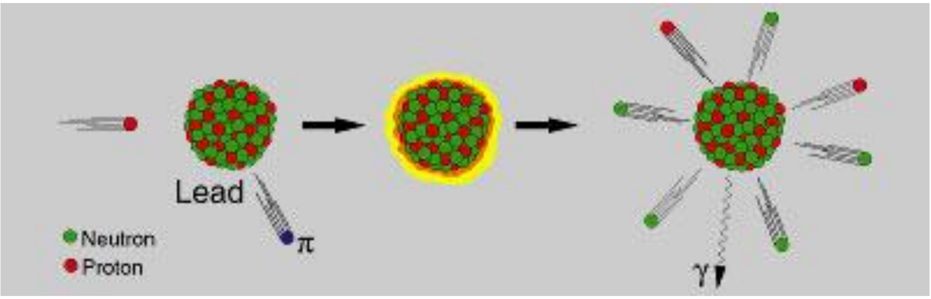


Large Neutron Sources

- **Nuclear fission in a reactor** produces neutrons which can be used for experiments. This (not the study of nuclear fission itself) is the purpose of nuclear research reactors.
- **A spallation source** is a high-flux source, in which protons that have been accelerated to high energies hit a target material, prompting the emission of neutrons.



Experimental TRIGA Reactor



SINQ Spallation Source at PSI

Small Neutron Sources: Overview

- Excitation levels with energies larger than the neutron binding energy are **not** produced as a result of any convenient radioactive decay process.
- Small neutron sources can be build based on:
  - Spontaneous Fission (SF).
  - (α,n) nuclear reactions.
  - Neutron ejection of a nucleus induced by gamma radiation (photoneutrons).
  - Photofission: Neutrons are produced when gamma rays with high enough energies cause heavy nuclei to fission.
  - In sealed tube neutron generators fusion reactions of deuterium and/or tritium ions are induced that produce neutrons.

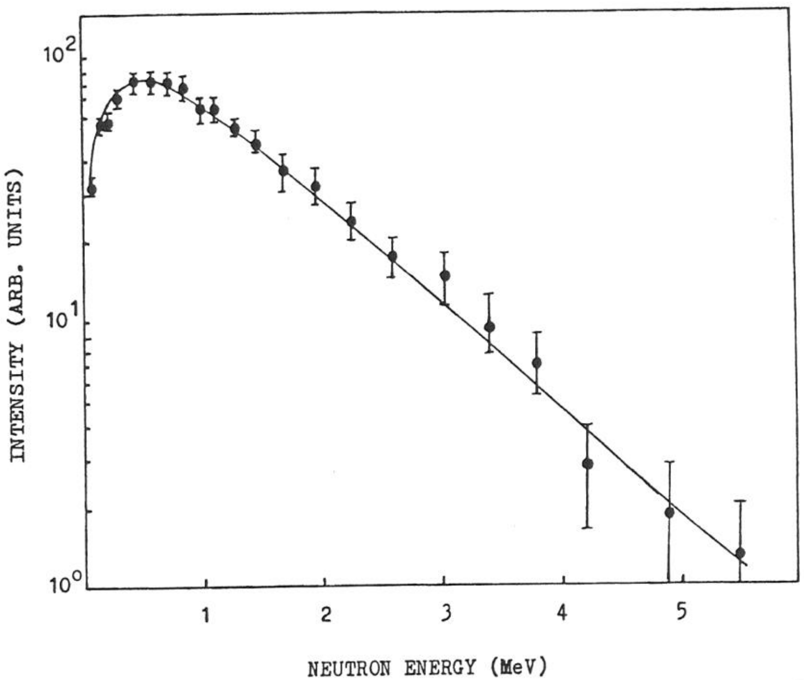
Neutron Sources: Spontaneous Fission (SF) (1)

- SF appears in many of the transuranic heavy nuclides (Z>92).
- It produces:
  - Several fast neutrons.
  - Heavy fission products.
  - Prompt fission γ-rays (in ns).
  - β and γ activity of the fission products.
- The neutron energy spectrum is peaked between 0.5 and 1 MeV and can be approximated by:

$$\frac{dN}{dE} = E^{1/2} e^{-E/T}$$

Spontaneous fission rates

U-235	5.60E-03 *f*/s-kg
U-238	6.93 *f*/s-kg
Pu-239	7.01 *f*/s-kg
Pu-240	489,000 *f*/s-kg



Measured neutron energy spectrum from the spontaneous fission of ^{252}Cf. (From Batenkov et al.[18])

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Neutron Sources: Spontaneous Fission (SF) (2)

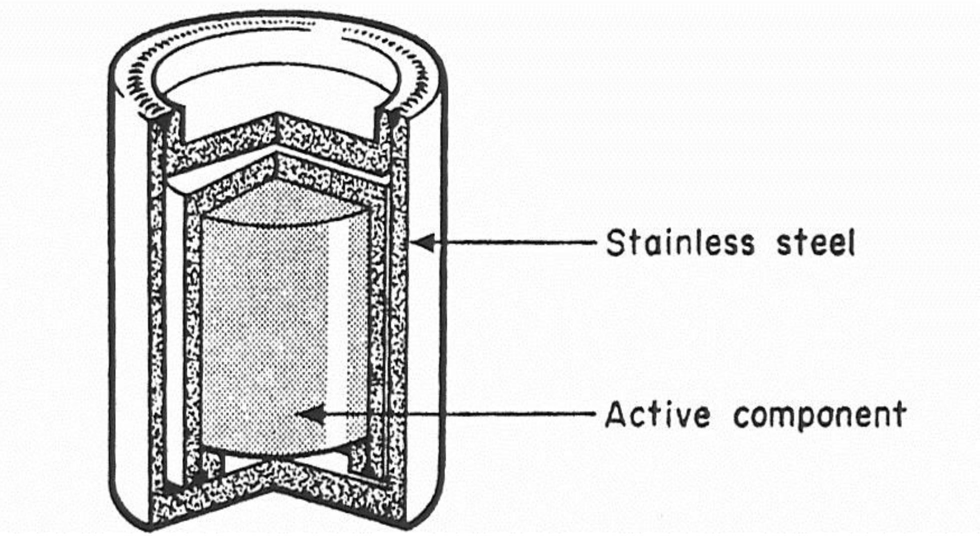
- The most common SF source is ^{252}Cf (Z=98).
- Characteristics:
  - **2.6 year half-life**
  - Dominant decay mechanism is α-decay
  - **Extremely radioactive** (1 mg spontaneously emits 170 million neutrons per minute)
- Produced in nuclear reactors: from irradiation of Cm with α-particles.
- ^{252}Cf neutron sources are typically 1/4" to 1/2" in diameter and 1" to 2" in length. The price of a typical ^{252}Cf neutron source is from $15,000 to $20,000.
- Some uses of the ^{252}Cf sources:
  - Neutron start-up source for some nuclear reactors, calibrating instrumentation.
  - Treatment of certain cervical and brain cancers where other radiation therapies are ineffective.
  - Radiography of aircraft to detect metal fatigue.
  - Airport neutron-activation detectors of explosives.
  - Neutron moisture gauges used to find water and petroleum layers in oil wells.
  - Portable neutron source in gold and silver prospecting for on-the-spot analysis.

Neutron Sources: (α,n) Sources (1)

- Neutrons are produced in (α,n)-reactions.
  - The source of α is a radioisotope.
  - Self-contained sources have a mixture of an α-emitter and a target material.
  - The maximum neutron yield comes from ^{9}Be as a target material.
- Sources of (α,n) neutrons:
  - All α-emitters are actinides: ^{239}Pu, ^{210}Po, ^{241}Am, ^{244}Cm, ^{226}Ra, etc.
  - Most α-particles are absorbed in the target, only 1 in 10^4 reacts with Be.
  - They form stable alloy of the form MBe_{13} (M=actinide metal), with no intermediate loss of energy for the α-particle.

Basic reaction for Be neutron sources:

$$^{4}_{2}\alpha + {}^{9}_{4}\text{Be} \rightarrow {}^{12}_{6}\text{C}^{*} + {}^{1}_{0}\text{n} \xrightarrow{61\text{fs}} {}^{12}_{6}\text{C} + \gamma\,(4.44\,\text{MeV})$$



Typical double-walled Be(α,n) source

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Neutron Sources: (α,n) Sources (2)

Most widely used

High n yields, high specific activity

Low γ background, simple α decay process.

Ideal

Intense γ background radiation from daughters

Characteristics of Be(α, n) Neutron Sources

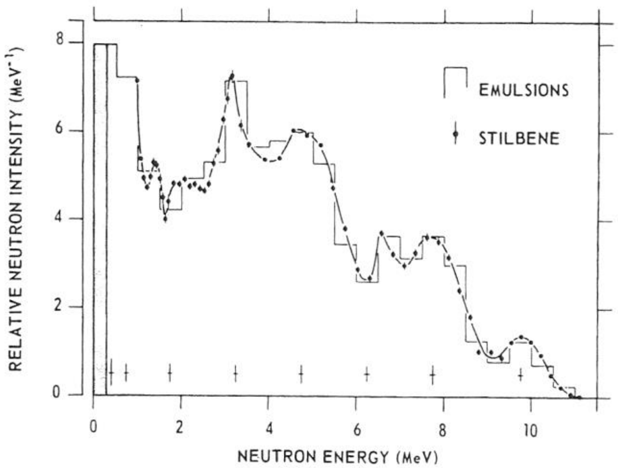
Source	Half-Life	E_α (MeV)	Neutron Yield per 10^6 Primary Alpha Particles: Calculated	Neutron Yield per 10^6 Primary Alpha Particles: Experimental	Percent Yield with $E_n < 1.5$ MeV: Calculated	Percent Yield with $E_n < 1.5$ MeV: Experimental
^{239}Pu/Be	24000 y	5.14	65	57	11	9–33
^{210}Po/Be	138 d	5.30	73	69	13	12
^{238}Pu/Be	87.4 y	5.48	79[a]	—	—	—
^{241}Am/Be	433 y	5.48	82	70	14	15–23
^{244}Cm/Be	18 y	5.79	100[b]	—	18	29
^{242}Cm/Be	162 d	6.10	118	106	22	26
^{226}Ra/Be + daughters	1602 y	Multiple	502	—	26	33–38
^{227}Ac/Be + daughters	21.6 y	Multiple	702	—	28	38

[a] From Anderson and Hertz.[22] All other data as calculated or cited in Geiger and Van der Zwan.[23]

[b] Does not include a 4% contribution from spontaneous fission of ^{244}Cm.

Neutron Sources: (α,n) Sources (3)

- Energy spectra of all sources with ^{9}Be are similar.
  - Differences reflect the small variations in the primary α-particle energies.
  - Thick sources have more „spread", i.e, the originally discrete α-energy spectrum is washed out.



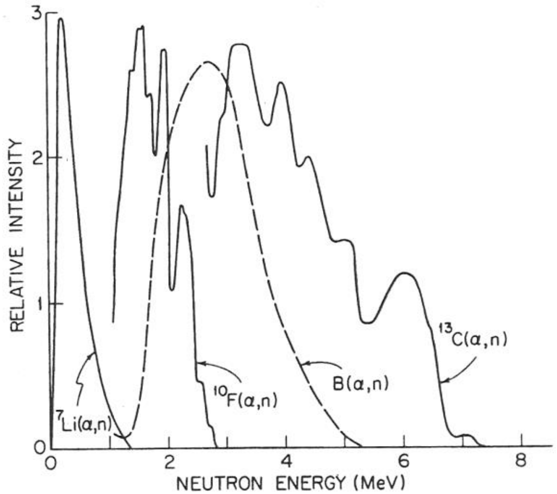
Measured energy spectra for neutrons from a ^{239}Pu/Be source containing 80 g of the isotope. (From Anderson and Neff.[25])

Additonal sources of (α,n)

Alternative (α, n) Isotopic Neutron Sources

Target	Reaction	Q-Value	Neutron Yield per 10^6 Alpha Particles
Natural B	^{10}B (α, n) ^{11}B(α, n)	+1.07 MeV +0.158 MeV	13 for ^{241}Am alpha particles
F	^{19}F(α, n)	−1.93 MeV	4.1 for ^{241}Am alpha particles
Isotopically separated ^{13}C	^{13}C(α, n)	+2.2 MeV	11 for ^{238}Pu alpha particles
Natural Li	^{7}Li(α, n)	−2.79 MeV	
Be (for comparison)	^{9}Be(α, n)	+5.71 MeV	70 for ^{241}Am alpha particles

Data from Lorch[19] and Geiger and Van der Zwan.[27]



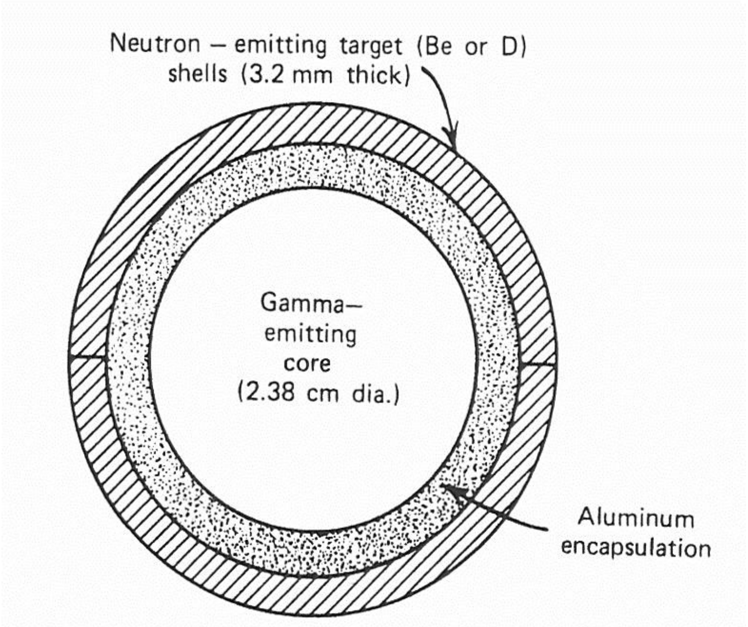
Neutron energy spectra from alternative (α, n) sources. (^{7}Li data from Geiger and Van der Zwan,[27] remainder from Lorch.[19])

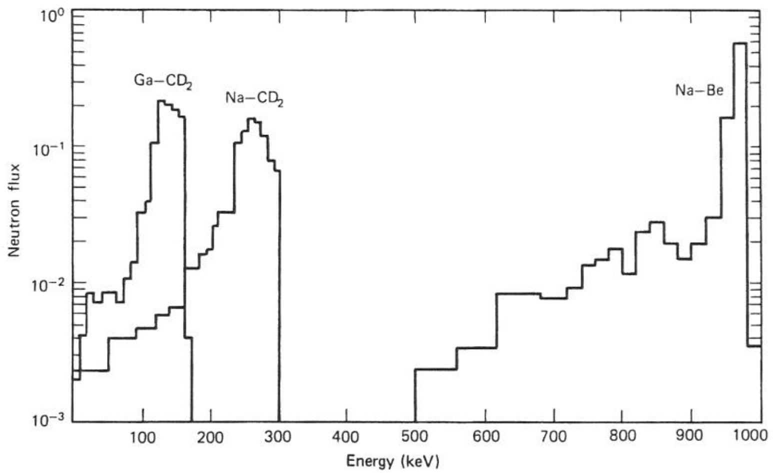
Neutron Sources: Photoneutrons (1)

- The excitation of the nucleus is done by high energy γ-rays:
  - Photoneutron sources combine a powerful γemitter with a target isotope.
  - Only two target nuclei are practical: ^{9}Be and ^{2}H:

$$
\begin{aligned}
{}^{9}_{4}Be + \gamma &\longrightarrow {}^{8}_{4}Be + {}^{1}_{0}n \qquad -1.666\text{MeV} \\
{}^{2}_{1}H + \gamma &\longrightarrow {}^{1}_{1}H + {}^{1}_{0}n \qquad -2.226\text{MeV}
\end{aligned}
$$

  - Photoneutron sources produce monoenergetic neutrons (for monoenergetic gammas).
  - They need very large γ-ray activities (1 out of 10^5-10^6 photons produces 1 n).
  - Common emitters are: ^{226}Ra, ^{124}Sb, ^{72}Ga, ^{140}La, ^{24}Na.
  - Very short half-lives require reactivation in a nuclear reactor between uses.





Neutron spectra calculated for the photoneutron source dimensions shown in Fig. 1.15. The gamma emitters are either ^{72}Ga or ^{24}Na. The outer shells are either deuterated polyethylene (CD_2) or beryllium (Be).

Neutron Sources: Photoneutrons (2)

Photoneutron Source Characteristics

Gamma-Ray Emitter	Half-Life[a]	Gamma Energy[a] (MeV)	Target	Neutron Energy[b] (keV)	Neutron Yield (n/s) for 10^{10} Bq Activity[c]
^{24}Na	15.0 h	2.7541	Be	967	340,000
		2.7541	D	263	330,000
^{28}Al	2.24 min	1.7787	Be	101	32,600
^{38}Cl	37.3 min	2.1676	Be	446	43,100
^{56}Mn	2.58 h	1.8107	Be	129	91,500
		2.1131		398	
		2.9598		1,149	
		2.9598	D	365	162
^{72}Ga	14.1 h	1.8611	Be	174	64,900
		2.2016		476	
		2.5077		748	
		2.5077	D	140	25,100
^{76}As	26.3 h	1.7877	Be	109	3,050
		2.0963		383	
^{88}Y	107 d	1.8361	Be	152	229,000
		2.7340		949	
		2.7340	D	253	160
^{116m}In	54.1 min	2.1121	Be	397	15,600
^{124}Sb	60.2 d	1.6910	Be	23	210,000
^{140}La	40.3 h	2.5217	Be	760	10,200
		2.5217	D	147	6,600
^{144}Pr	17.3 min	2.1856	Be	462	690

[a]Decay data from Ref. 1.

[b]Calculated for $\theta = \pi/2$, approximate midpoint of primary spectrum.

[c]Monte Carlo calculations for the source dimensions given in Fig. 1.15. Outer target shells are either metallic Be or deuterated polyethylene. Core materials assumed to be NaF, Al, CCl_4, MnO_2, Ga_2O_3, As_2O_3, Y_2O_3, In, Sb, La_2O_3, and Pr_2O_3.

Source: G. F. Knoll, "Radioisotope Neutron Sources," Chap. 2 in *Neutron Sources for Basic Physics and Applications*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1983.

Neutron Sources: Accelerated Charged Particles

- Alpha particles are the only heavy-charged particles with low Z available from radioisotopes.
- Other charged particles for neutron sources must be artificially accelerated.
- Two of the most common reactions (with their Q-values) are fusion reactions:

$$\text{The D-D reaction:} \quad {}^2_1H + {}^2_1H \longrightarrow {}^3_2He + {}^1_0n \quad +3.26\,\text{MeV}$$

$$\text{The D-T reaction:} \quad {}^2_1H + {}^3_1H \longrightarrow {}^4_2He + {}^1_0n \quad +17.6\,\text{MeV}$$

- Characteristics of the sources:
  - Low coulomb barrier (low Z target) requires accelerating potentials of 100-300 kV for the charged particles.
  - All neutrons have the same energy (large Q-value): 3 MeV (D-D) and 14 MeV (D-T).
  - Typical yields: 1 mA ^{2}H beam will produce 10^9 n/s for ^{2}H and 10^{11} n/s for ^{3}H targets, so a compact source with a portable high-voltage generator is possible.
  - Other reactions ^{9}Be(d,n), ^{7}Li(p,n) and ^{3}H(p,n) require large accelerators (Q < 0).

Literature

- Glenn F. Knoll, *"Radiation Detection and Measurement"*, John Wiley & Sons (4th edition, 2010, and 3rd edition, 2000)
- James E. Martin, *"Physics for Radiation Protection"*, Wiley-VCH (2nd edition, 2006)
- James E. Turner, *"Atoms, Radiation, and Radiation Protection"*, Wiley-VCH (3rd edition, 2007)