

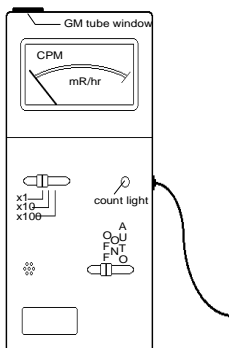
Radiation Monitor



(Order Code RM-BTD)

The Radiation Monitor is used to monitor alpha, beta, and gamma radiation. It can be used with a number of interfaces to measure the total number of counts per specified timing interval. Since it has its own analog display, it can also be used independent of interfaces in the field to measure radiation levels. The Radiation Monitor allows students to

- Detect the presence of a source of radiation.
- Monitor counts/interval (rate) as different thicknesses of a particular type of shielding are placed between the Geiger-Mueller tube of the Radiation Monitor and a beta or gamma source.
- Compare the effect of different types of materials to shield beta or gamma radiation.
- Set up a histogram with a very long run time to show students how initial “randomness” of data develops into a “bell-shaped” curve.
- Measure radiation of common radioactive materials, such as lantern mantels or old Fiestaware.
- Monitor variation in background radiation at different elevations.
- Monitor radioactivity in the environment over long periods of time.
- Monitor counts per interval (rate) from a beta or gamma radiation source as a function of the distance between the source and the Radiation Monitor.



This document describes the use of both the RM-BTD and RM-DG Radiation Monitors. Each of these Radiation Monitors includes a cable that allows the monitor to be connected to a data-collection interface.

The cable that accompanies the RM-BTD Radiation Monitor has a small 3.5 mm (micro-miniature) stereo jack on one end and a white rectangular British Telecom (BT) plug on the other end. This cable is used to directly connect the RM-BTD to the Vernier LabPro® interface or to the Texas Instruments CBL 2™.

The cable that accompanies the RM-DG has a small 3.5 mm (micro-miniature) stereo jack on one end and a quarter-inch stereo plug on the other end. The RM-DG will plug directly into a ULI II.

Contact us if you want to use this radiation monitor with the original ULI.

NOTE: This product is to be used for educational purposes only. It is not appropriate for industrial, medical, research, or commercial applications.

Using the Radiation Monitor with a Computer

This sensor can be used with a Macintosh® or PC computer and either the Vernier LabPro or Universal Lab Interface. Here is the general procedure to follow when using the Radiation Monitor with a computer:

1. Connect the Radiation Monitor to the appropriate port on the interface.
2. LabPro and RM-BTD:
 - Plug the 3.5 mm stereo jack end of the cable into the Radiation Monitor.
 - Plug the white British Telecom end of the cable into DIG 1 on the interface. ULI and RM-DG:
 - Plug the 3.5 mm stereo jack end of the cable into the Radiation Monitor.
 - Plug the quarter-inch stereo plug into DG 1 on the ULI II. The RM-DG can also be used with the original ULI with the proper cable. Contact us for details.
3. Start the data-collection software on the computer.
4. Open an experiment file in *Logger Pro*®, and you are ready to collect data.

Using the Radiation Monitor with TI Graphing Calculators

This sensor can be used with a TI graphing calculator and the LabPro or CBL 2 interfaces. Here is the general procedure to follow when using the Radiation Monitor with a graphing calculator:

1. Load a data-collection program into your TI graphing calculator using your TI-GRAPH LINK™ or TI Connect software and cable. If you are using the Radiation Monitor with LabPro or CBL 2, load the DataRad program. This program can be found on the Vernier web site (www.vernier.com).
2. Use the link cable to connect the interface to the TI graphing calculator. Firmly press in the cable ends.
3. Connect the Radiation Monitor to the data-collection interface. Plug the 3.5 mm stereo jack end of the cable into the Radiation Monitor. Plug the white British Telecom end of the cable into DIG 1 on the interface.
4. Turn on the calculator. Start the data-collection program and proceed to the main screen.
5. Your equipment is now ready to collect data. (You may want to change data collection modes. The exact procedure will depend upon the calculator program you are using.)

Using the Radiation Monitor with Palm Powered™ Handhelds

This sensor can be used with a Palm Powered handheld and the LabPro. Use the following general setup procedure:

1. Connect the Palm Powered handheld, LabPro, and the Radiation Monitor.
2. Start Data Pro.
3. Tap New, or choose New from the Data Pro menu. The Radiation Monitor is not identified automatically. You will need to tap SETUP and select the sensor.
4. Return to the Main screen.
5. You are ready to collect data.

Specifications

Sensor: LND 712 halogen-quenched GM tube with a mica window, 1.5 to 2.0 mg/cm² thick. Rated at 1000 counts per minute using a Cesium-137 laboratory standard.

Power: One 9-volt alkaline battery provides a battery life of 2000 hours at normal background radiation levels.

Accuracy: Noninstrumental aligned, approximately $\pm 20\%$ of full scale. Instrumental aligned, approximately $\pm 10\%$ of full scale.

Dimensions: 38 X 62 X 145 mm (1.5 X 2.8 X 5.7 in)

Weight: 245 g (8.8 oz) with battery installed

Energy Sensitivity:

Alpha: Down to 2.5 MeV; typical detection efficiency at 3.6 MeV is greater than 80%.

Beta: 50 KeV, typical 35% detection efficiency.

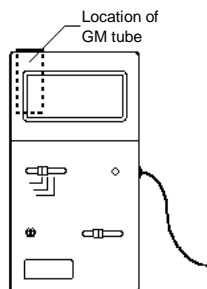
Gamma and X-rays: Down to 10 KeV typical through the end window, 40 KeV through the case.

Audio Output: Audible indication of each count available using the Audio switch position.

Temperature Range: 0 to 50°C

How the Radiation Monitor Works

The Radiation Monitor senses ionizing radiation by means of a Geiger-Mueller (GM) tube. The tube is fully enclosed inside the instrument. When ionizing radiation or a particle strikes the tube, it is sensed electronically and monitored by its own display, a computer, or by a flashing count light. When the switch is in the AUDIO position, the instrument will also beep with each ionizing event. It is calibrated for Cesium-137, but also serves as an excellent indicator of relative intensities for other sources of ionizing radiation. Gamma radiation is measured in milli-Roentgens per hour. Alpha and beta are measured in counts/minute (CPM). About 5 to 25 counts at random intervals (depending on location and altitude) can be expected every minute from naturally occurring background radiation.



The position of the GM tube is shown in Figure 2. The end of the tube has a thin mica window. This mica window is protected by the screen at the end of the sensor. It allows alpha particles to reach the GM tube and be detected. The mica window will also sense low energy beta particles and gamma radiation that cannot penetrate the plastic case or the side of the tube. Note: Some very low energy radiation cannot be detected through the mica window.

Further Tips for Monitoring Radiation

To measure gamma and X-rays, hold the back of the Radiation Monitor toward the source of radiation. Low-energy gamma radiation (10-40 KeV) cannot penetrate the side of the GM tube, but may be detected through the end window.

To detect alpha radiation, position the monitor so the suspected source of radiation is next to the GM window. Alpha radiation will not travel far through air, so put the source as close as possible (within 1/4 inch) to the screen without touching it. Even a humid day can limit the already short distance an alpha particle can travel.

To detect beta radiation, point the end window toward the source of radiation. Beta radiation has a longer range through air than alpha particles, but can usually be shielded (e.g., by a few millimeters of aluminum). High energy beta particles may be monitored through the back of the case.

To determine whether radiation is alpha, beta, or gamma, hold the back of the monitor toward the specimen. If there is an indication of radioactivity, it is most likely gamma or high energy beta. Place a piece of aluminum about 3mm (1/8") thick between the case and the specimen. If the indication stops, the radiation is most likely beta. (To some degree, most common radioactive isotopes emit both beta and gamma radiation.) If there is no indication through the back of the case, position the end window close to, but not touching, the specimen. If there is an indication, it is probably alpha or beta. If a sheet of paper is placed between the window, and the indication stops, the radiation is most likely alpha. (Note: In order to avoid particles falling into the instrument, do not hold the specimen directly above the end window.)

The Radiation Monitor does not detect neutron, microwave, radio frequency (RF), laser, infrared, or ultraviolet radiation. It is calibrated for Cesium-137, and is most accurate for it and other isotopes of similar energies. Some isotopes it will detect relatively well are cobalt-60, technicium-99m, phosphorus-32, and strontium-90.

Some types of radiation are very difficult or impossible for this GM tube to detect. Beta emissions from tritium are too weak to detect using the Radiation Monitor. Americium-241, used in some smoke detectors, can overexcite the GM tube and give an indication of a higher level of radiation than is actually there.

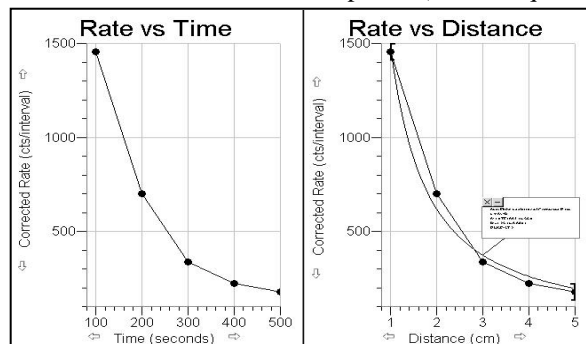
Using the Radiation Monitor in Your Classes

Here are some examples of how the Radiation Monitor can be used in a science class.

Counts/Interval vs. Distance Studies

The data in the two graphs below were collected by monitoring gamma radiation at various distances from a Radiation Monitor. Data were collected with the run intervals set at 100 seconds. After each 100 second interval, the source was moved one centimeter further from the source. Since distance is proportional to time (300

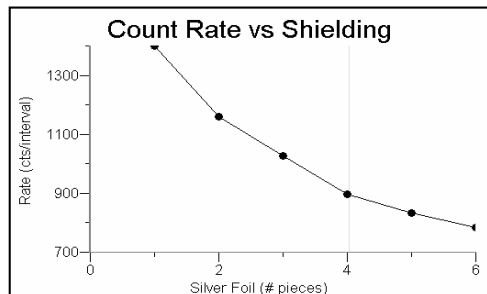
seconds in the first graph corresponds to 3 cm in the second graph; 400 seconds to 4 cm, etc.), a new distance column was made using *time* divided by 100. The curved fit shown corresponds to distance raised to the -2 power (inverse squared).



Counts/interval vs. time and distance

Counts/Interval vs. Shielding Studies

The data shown here were collected by monitoring gamma radiation with an increasing number of pieces of silver foil placed between the source and a Radiation Monitor. Data was collected with the run interval set at 100 seconds. After each 100 second interval, another piece of silver foil was placed between the source and the Radiation Monitor. Since the number of pieces is proportional to time (300 seconds corresponds to 3 pieces of foil, 400 seconds to 4 pieces of foil, etc.), a new column, pieces of silver foil, was made using *time* divided by 100.



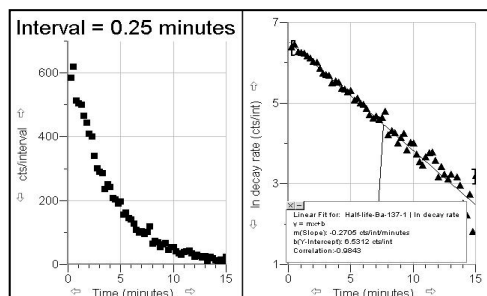
Counts/interval vs. thickness of filter

Half-life Determination (counts/interval vs. time)

Using a daughter isotope generator, it is possible to generate isotopes with a relatively short half-life. A solution that selectively dissolves a short half-life daughter isotope is passed through the generator. The linear plot of natural log of decay rate vs. time can be used to determine the half-life of the daughter isotope, using the formula

$$\ln 2 = k \cdot t_{1/2}$$

where k is the decay rate constant and $t_{1/2}$ is the half-life of the daughter isotope (in minutes).

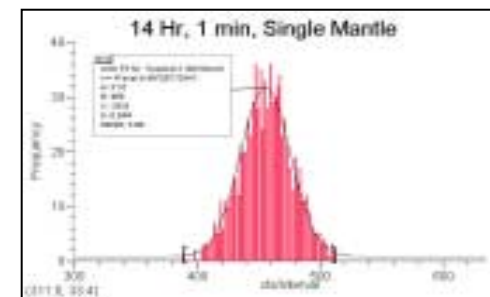


Half-life determination

In the plot of natural log of decay rate vs. time, the decay rate constant, k , is equal to $-m$. Using the slope value of $m = -0.217$ in the example here, the half-life was calculated to be 3.19 minutes.

Histogram Data Analysis

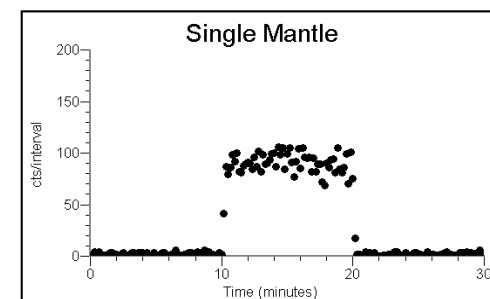
For an easy in-class experiment, set up a histogram with a very long run time and start data collection. Whenever the graph “overflows” the top of the graph, it will automatically be rescaled. This data collection shows students how initial “randomness” of data develops into a “bell-shaped” curve. A gamma radiation source was used.



A distribution graph

Lantern Mantels

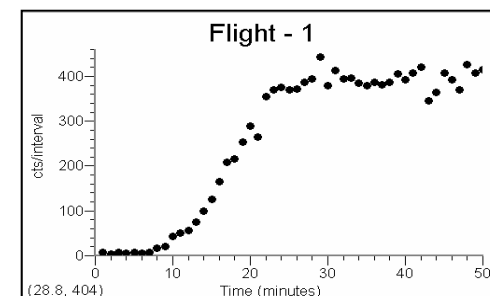
This graph shows a study of old and new Coleman mantle lanterns. These mantles formerly contained thorium and were often used for radiation demonstrations. In the early 1990s, Coleman changed the production methods and now the mantles are not radioactive.



New and old lantern mantles

Background Radiation

Here is an experiment performed in the days before airlines insisted that you turn off your personal computer before takeoff. It shows the counts/interval between takeoff and the time the plane reached its cruising altitude of 39,000 ft.



Radiation during an airline flight

Curricular Materials

Nuclear Radiation with Computers and Calculators by John Gastineau

This book has six experiments written for the Vernier Radiation Monitor and Student Radiation Monitor. Each of the six experiments has a computer version (for LabPro or ULL), a calculator version (for LabPro or CBL 2), and Palm OS version (for LabPro). The Nuclear Radiation CD included with the book contains the word-processing files for all student experiments.

Radioactive Sources

If you don't have radiation sources, you may be able to obtain pre-1990 Coleman lantern mantles or other brands of lantern mantles (for a weak source of Thorium). You may also be able to find pottery, watches, clocks, or minerals that are moderately radioactive.

For something more active, order radioactive minerals from any of these scientific supply houses:

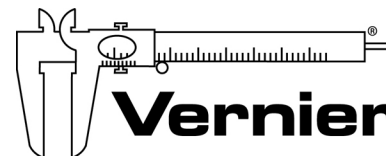
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