Congressman Tim Bishop

FIRST DISTRICT -- NEW YORK

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AT BISHOP'S URGING, RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL REMOVED FROM PATCHOGUE-MEDFORD HS

Congressman's Effort Saves Taxpayers $40,000

Medford, NY: At the urging of Congressman Tim Bishop, the Department of Energy (DOE) recently removed a radioactive device from Patchogue-Medford High School. Bishop acted on a request from the Patchogue-Medford School District, who informed him that the removal would cost taxpayers $40,000 to go through a private firm.

The material was contained in a gammator, which is a lead-shielded housing that contains radioactive materials (400 curies of Cesium-137). The district has owned the gammator since 1964, when it was used in several high school courses. While the device posed no immediate risk to the public, Cesium-137 is a high radioactive isotope, which could be used to construct a dirty bomb.

"In today's world, we cannot possibly leave a potential terrorist weapon in a high school," Bishop said. "Times have changed, and so must our attitude about radioactive material. I am pleased that removing this material comes at no cost to the taxpayers of the Patchogue-Medford School District."

"We are delighted that Congressman Bishop could help rid our high school of the gammator at no cost to our school district," Dr. Veronica A. McDermott, Superintendent, Patchogue-Medford School District, said. "I would like to thank the Congressman for his responsiveness to our request and for all of his help."

Dr. McDermott was at the High School to observe the removal of the gammator. The work was done by officials of the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration's Offsite Source Recovery Project. Since 1999, this project has removed more than 7,000 radioactive sealed sources from industry, academia, health care facilities, and government laboratories. They are safely and securely stored at DOE sites.

The gammator was one of 120 that were distributed in the early-1960s to schools, hospitals and other institutions under the "Atoms for Peace" programs. Cesium-137 is a highly radioactive isotope that appears in powdered or pellet form, making it highly portable and very dangerous.

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