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Can You Carry Limited Quantities of Radioactive Materials on Passenger Carrying Aircraft?

Radioactive materials prepared for shipment under the provisions of 49 CFR 173.421 (Excepted packages for limited quantities of Class 7 radioactive materials) or 173.424 (Excepted packages for radioactive instruments and articles), are not subject to the requirements of the Hazardous material Regulations (HMR: 49 CFR Parts 100-199) when transported by air.

Therefore, limited quantities of radioactive materials or excepted instruments or articles may be transported in carry-on or checked baggage on passenger aircraft regardless of the end use of the material. [The provision in 49 CFR 175.700(c) that limits the carriage of radioactive material in carry-on luggage to materials intended for use in, or incident to, research, medical diagnosis or treatment, does not apply.]

Passengers carrying the radioactive material may hand-carry the documentation required by 49 CFR 173.421 and 173.422.

It should be noted that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Technical Instructions for The Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air, commonly referred to as the ICAO Technical Instructions specifically prohibits passengers from carrying excepted radioactive materials in the cabin or in checked baggage. Many commercial airlines follow the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations which are based on the ICAO TI. Therefore, even in the U.S., airlines may choose to prohibit the carriage of excepted radioactive materials in the cabin and checked baggage based on these ICAO international regulations or IATA industry standards.

A best practice would be for the passenger who wants to carry limited quantities of radioactive material on a passenger carrying aircraft to contact the specific airline to inquire as to if it is prohibited.