

Thousands of everyday products and materials containing radioactive metals are surfacing across the United States and around the world.

Common kitchen cheese graters, reclining chairs, women's handbags and tableware manufactured with contaminated metals have been identified, some after having been in circulation for as long as a decade. So have fencing wire and fence posts, shovel blades, elevator buttons, airline parts and steel used in construction.

A Scripps Howard News Service investigation has found that -- because of haphazard screening, an absence of oversight and substantial disincentives for businesses to report contamination -- no one knows how many tainted goods are in circulation in the United States.

But thousands of consumer goods and millions of pounds of unfinished metal and its byproducts have been found to contain low levels of radiation, and experts think the true amount could be much higher, perhaps by a factor of 10.

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