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Production of ^{236g}Np and ^{236}Pu in proton induced nuclear reactions on natU

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Radiochemical analysis of ^{237}Np is important in a number of fields, such as nuclear forensics, environmental analysis and measurements throughout the nuclear fuel cycle. However analysis is complicated by the lack of a stable isotope of neptunium. Although various tracers have been used, including ^{235}Np , ^{239}Np and even ^{236}Pu , none are entirely satisfactory. However, ^{236g}Np would be a better candidate for a neptunium yield tracer, as its long half-life means that it is useable as both a radiometric and mass spectrometric measurements. ^{236}Pu is a valuable radionuclide itself and has been routinely used as a yield tracer for analysis of plutonium in environmental and technological samples.

Current study investigates the feasibility of ^{236}Np and ^{236}Pu production by (p,3n) reaction on natural uranium. The targets – either metallic uranium, U_3O_8 or uranyl nitrate – were prepared by compaction into copper or aluminium substrates, with a thin aluminium or titanium cover foil and irradiated with 25 MeV protons on the cyclotron at the University of Birmingham. Targets were cooled for 20 days to allow the short lived fission products to decay away and then chemically processed to separate Np and Pu fraction by solvent extraction, ion-exchange and extraction chromatography. The neptunium and plutonium fractions were assayed by γ - and α -spectrometry and the production yields were determined and discussed.

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