AQA GCSE Physics | 8463

SPECIFICATION POINT 4.4.2.4

Radioactive contamination

Past-paper questions

Tier	**Higher**
Question groups	**10**
Available paper years	**2007–2025**

Using this booklet

1. Answer the questions in order and show your working.
2. Original question numbers and marks are retained.
3. Print at actual size (100%) for measuring questions.
4. Use the companion answer booklet to check your work.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Whole questions are retained for context, so some parts assess other specification points. Current and legacy sources are labelled. Continue on extra paper if needed.

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 01

November 2007 | PHY1B | Original Q8 | Legacy

QUESTION EIGHT

A former spy was poisoned with the radioactive isotope polonium-210.

8A Some of the spy's friends were found to be contaminated with polonium-210. They were safe from the radiation unless they had taken some of the polonium-210 into their bodies.

This is because the radiation given off by polonium-210 is . . .

1 alpha particles.

2 beta particles.

3 gamma rays.

4 X-rays.

8B It is difficult to detect the radiation given off by polonium-210 using a detector outside the body because the radiation has . . .

1 high penetrating power.

2 a long range in air.

3 low ionising power.

4 low penetrating power.

8C Scientists carried out many tests at restaurants, hotels and airports. This caused much public anxiety.

Which one of the following statements is true?

1 The particles emitted by polonium-210 are radioactive.

2 Anyone too close to a polonium-210 source will become radioactive.

3 If you swallow polonium-210, it will damage cells in the body.

4 The radiation from polonium-210 makes clothes glow in the dark.

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

8D Another isotope of polonium is polonium-208.

Compared with polonium-210, polonium-208 has . . .

1 more neutrons.

2 fewer neutrons.

3 more protons.

4 fewer protons.

Turn over for the next question

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 02

June 2008 | PHY1H | Original Q6 | Legacy

6 In 1986, a nuclear reactor exploded in a power station at Chernobyl in the Ukraine.

6 (a) The table gives information about some of the radioactive substances released into the air by the explosion.

Radioactive substance	Half-life	Type of radiation emitted
Iodine-131	8 days	beta and gamma
Caesium-134	2 years	beta
Caesium-137	30 years	beta

6 (a) (i) How is the structure of a caesium-134 atom different from the structure of a caesium-137 atom?

.....

(1 mark)

6 (a) (ii) What is a beta particle and from which part of an atom is a beta particle emitted?

.....

.....

(1 mark)

6 (a) (iii) Once a radioactive substance is dissolved in rainwater, it can enter the food chain.

Following the Chernobyl explosion, some milk supplies were found to be radioactive.

If one litre of milk contaminated with iodine-131 gives a count rate of 400 counts/second, how long will it take for the count rate to fall to 25 counts/second?

Show clearly how you work out your answer.

.....

.....

.....

Time taken = ... days

(2 marks)

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 02 · continued

for mark

6 (a) (iv) After 20 years, the caesium-137 emitted into the atmosphere is a more serious problem than the iodine-131.

Explain why.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(2 marks)

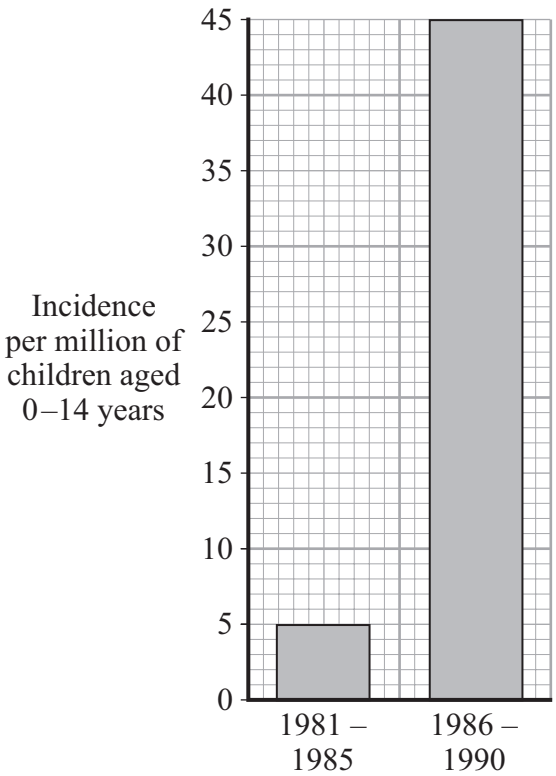
Question 6 continues on the next page

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 02 · continued

for mark

6 (b) The bar chart compares the incidence of thyroid cancer in Ukrainian children, aged 0–14 years, before and after the Chernobyl explosion.



Of the children that developed thyroid cancer, 64% lived in the areas most contaminated by the radiation.

Considering this data, can you be certain that a child who developed thyroid cancer between 1986 and 1990 did so because of the Chernobyl explosion?

Explain the reason for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

(2 marks)

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 02 · continued

for mark

6 (c) In 1991, some scientists compared the health of two groups of people: a *control* group and a group that had been exposed to the radiation from Chernobyl.

What people would have been in the *control* group?

.....

(1 mark)

6 (d) Although there are some risks associated with nuclear power stations, it is likely that new ones will be built.

Give **two** reasons to justify the use of nuclear power.

1 .....

.....

2 .....

.....

(2 marks)

11

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

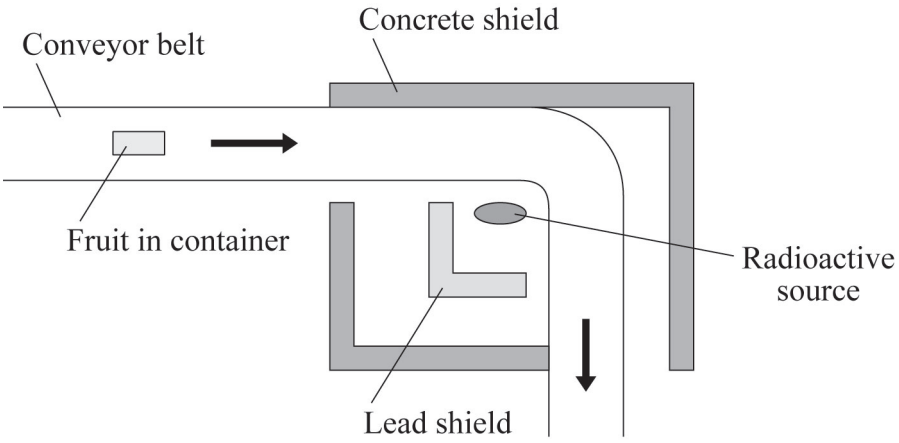
Question 03

March 2009 | PHY1BP | Original Q3 | Legacy

QUESTION THREE

In some countries, fruit is passed in front of a radioactive source. The gamma radiation from the source kills bacteria. This keeps the fruit fresh for longer.

The main process is shown in the diagram.



3A Gamma radiation is used because it is . . .

1 able to penetrate the container and fruit.

2 stopped by the lead shield.

3 not harmful to people.

4 the only radiation that can kill bacteria.

3B The amount of radiation absorbed by the fruit can be increased by . . .

1 moving the source further from the fruit.

2 packing the fruit in thicker containers.

3 slowing down the conveyor belt.

4 speeding up the conveyor belt.

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 03 · continued March 2009 | PHY1BP | Original Q3 | Legacy

3C Some fruit growers use X-ray machines instead of gamma ray sources.

The X-rays are safer to work with because . . .

1 gamma ray sources are used in hospitals.

2 X-ray machines can be switched on and off.

3 gamma rays have a lower frequency than X-rays.

4 X-rays have a shorter wavelength than gamma rays.

3D Some scientists investigated the effect of radiation on the vitamin C content of fruit.

They measured the amount of radiation absorbed by some fruit.

They also measured the amount of vitamin C in the fruit before and after the radiation treatment.

Which row of the table describes the variables for a fair test?

	Amount of radiation absorbed	Amount of vitamin C lost during irradiation	Size and type of fruit
1	independent	dependent	control
2	independent	control	dependent
3	dependent	independent	control
4	control	independent	dependent

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 04

June 2011 | PHY1H | Original Q2 | Legacy

2 (a) By 2023, nearly all of the existing nuclear power stations in the UK will be closed down.

2 (a) (i) Before a nuclear power station can be demolished, the remaining nuclear fuel, radioactive waste materials and reactor must be carefully removed.

What is this process called?

Put a tick (✓) in the box next to your answer.

decommissioning ☐

decontaminating ☐

dismantling ☐

(1 mark)

2 (a) (ii) The workers are exposed to radiation as they remove the reactor. One of the biggest risks is from the isotope cobalt-60, which has a half-life of 5.3 years.

Explain the advantage of waiting 11 years after a nuclear power station has closed down before starting to remove the reactor.

.....

.....

.....

.....

(2 marks)

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 04 · continued

2 (b) It is almost certain that new nuclear power stations will be built in the UK.

The table shows the results of surveys asking people in the UK whether they were in favour of, or against, the building of new nuclear power stations.

	2001	2005	2007
Percentage (%) in favour	20	41	65
Percentage (%) against	60	28	20
Percentage (%) not sure	20	31	15

2 (b) (i) From these surveys, how did public opinion on the building of new nuclear power stations change between 2001 and 2007?

.....

.....

(1 mark)

2 (b) (ii) Suggest a reason why some people may think that the results from these surveys are unreliable.

.....

.....

(1 mark)

2 (b) (iii) Give **one** reason in favour of building new nuclear power stations.

.....

.....

(1 mark)

Question 2 continues on the next page

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 04 · continued

2 (c) The government of one Middle Eastern country has decided to build its first nuclear power station. The oil that would have been used to generate electricity can then be sold to other countries.

On what is this decision based?

Put a tick (✓) in the box next to your answer.

economic issues ☐

ethical issues ☐

social issues ☐

(1 mark)

7

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 05

June 2013 | PH2HP | Original Q5 | Legacy

5 In 2011 an earthquake caused severe damage to a nuclear power station in Japan. The damage led to the release of large amounts of radioactive iodine-131($^{131}_{53}I$) into the atmosphere.

5 (a) The table gives some information about an atom of iodine-131($^{131}_{53}I$).

Complete the table.

mass number	131
number of protons	53
number of neutrons	

(1 mark)

5 (b) Complete the sentence.

The number of protons in an atom is called the proton number or

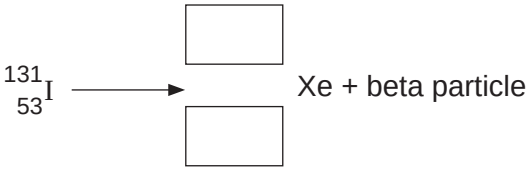
the ..... number.

(1 mark)

5 (c) An atom of iodine-131 decays into an atom of xenon (Xe) by emitting a beta particle.

5 (c) (i) The decay of iodine-131 can be represented by the equation below.

Complete the equation by writing the correct number in each of the **two** boxes.



(2 marks)

Question 5 continues on the next page

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 05 · continued

5 (c) (ii) A sample of rainwater contaminated with iodine-131 gives a count rate of 1200 counts per second.

Calculate how many days it will take for the count rate from the sample of rainwater to fall to 75 counts per second.

Half-life of iodine-131 = 8 days

Show clearly how you work out your answer.

.....

.....

..... days
(2 marks)

5 (c) (iii) If people drink water contaminated with iodine-131, the iodine-131 builds up in the thyroid gland. This continues until the thyroid is saturated with iodine-131 and cannot absorb any more. The radiation emitted from the iodine-131 could cause cancer of the thyroid.

In Japan, people likely to be drinking water contaminated with iodine-131 were advised to take tablets containing a non-radioactive isotope of iodine.

Suggest why this advice was given.

.....

.....

.....

.....
(2 marks)

8

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

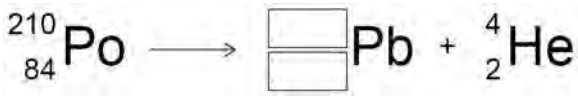
Question 06

June 2019 | 8463/1H | Original Q5

0 5 Polonium-210 $\left({}^{210}_{84}\mathrm{Po}\right)$ is a radioactive isotope that decays by emitting alpha radiation.

0 5 . 1 Complete the decay equation for polonium-210

[2 marks]



0 5 . 2 Explain why contamination of the inside of the human body by a radioactive material that emits alpha radiation is highly dangerous.

[3 marks]

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 06 · continued

0 5 . 3 A sample of polonium-210 was left for 414 days.

After this time it had a mass of 1.45×10^{-4} g

The half-life of polonium-210 is 138 days.

Calculate the initial mass of the sample.

[3 marks]

Initial mass = _____ g

8

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 07

June 2022 | 8463/1H | Original Q7

0 7 Alpha particles, beta particles and gamma rays are types of nuclear radiation.

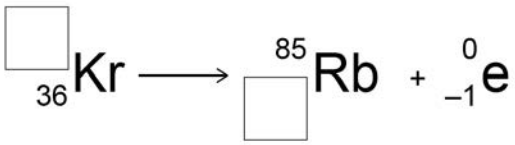
0 7 . 1 What does an alpha particle consist of?

[1 mark]

0 7 . 2 A krypton (Kr) nucleus decays into a rubidium (Rb) nucleus by emitting a beta particle.

Complete the nuclear equation for this decay by writing the missing number in each box.

[2 marks]



0 7 . 3 Internal contamination of the human body means radioactive material is inside the human body.

Explain how the risk from internal contamination is different to the risk from external irradiation by a source of alpha radiation.

[5 marks]

8

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 08

June 2023 | 8463/1H | Original Q5

0 5 Some isotopes emit nuclear radiation.

0 5 . 1 Carbon-14 and carbon-12 are isotopes of carbon.

Compare the structure of an atom of carbon-14 with the structure of an atom of carbon-12.

[3 marks]

0 5 . 2 Carbon-14 is a radioactive isotope.

Carbon-14 has a half-life of 5700 years.

What does 'a half-life of 5700 years' mean?

[1 mark]

Question 5 continues on the next page

Table 1 gives the half-life of some other radioactive isotopes.

Table 1

Isotope	Half-life in seconds
Nitrogen-18	0.62
Nitrogen-17	4.17
Fluorine-17	64.37
Fluorine-18	6584.34

0 5 . 3 A sample of fluorine-17 has an activity that is one quarter of its original activity.

Calculate the age of the sample of fluorine-17.

[2 marks]

Age = _____ s

0 5 . 4 All of the isotopes in **Table 1** emit beta radiation.

Explain which isotope would cause the biggest risk to a person's health based only on the half-life of each isotope.

[3 marks]

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 08 · continued

0 5 . 5 People who work in the nuclear power industry need to be aware of irradiation and contamination.

Describe the difference between irradiation and contamination.

[2 marks]

0 5 . 6 Give **one** health risk to a person working close to a source of nuclear radiation.

[1 mark]

0 5 . 7 Workers in nuclear power stations are monitored to check the radiation they emit.

A worker stands 1 cm away from a radiation detector.

The amount of radiation the worker emits is recorded.

Explain why the worker needs to stand close to the radiation detector.

[2 marks]

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 08 · continued

0 5 . 8 Workers in the nuclear power industry are exposed to nuclear radiation.

Pilots on aircraft are exposed to cosmic radiation from space.

daily dose caused by working in a nuclear power station = 0.00050 mSv

hourly dose from cosmic rays to a pilot while flying = 0.0030 mSv

Calculate the number of days it takes for a nuclear power station worker to receive the same dose as a pilot flying for 24 hours.

[3 marks]

Number of days = _____

17

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

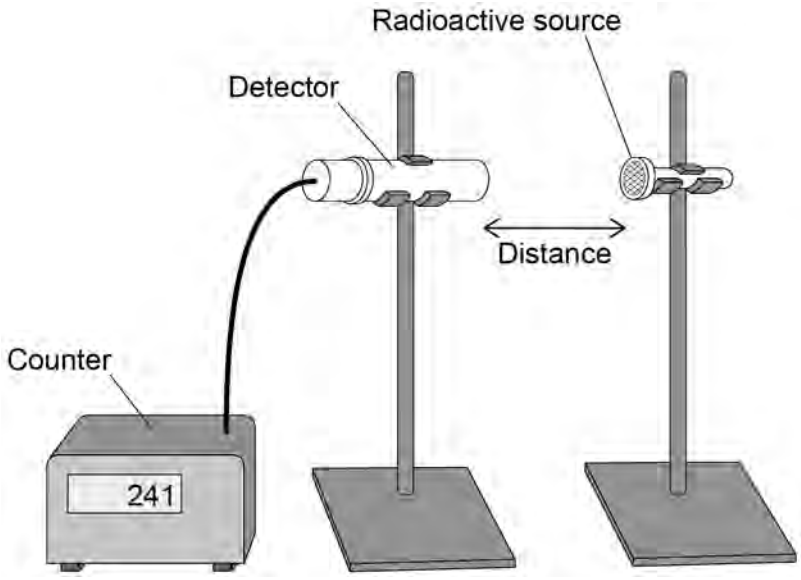
Question 09

June 2024 | 8463/1H | Original Q9

0 9 A teacher investigated the radiation emitted by two different radioactive sources, **A** and **B**.

Figure 14 shows a radiation detector positioned near one of the radioactive sources.

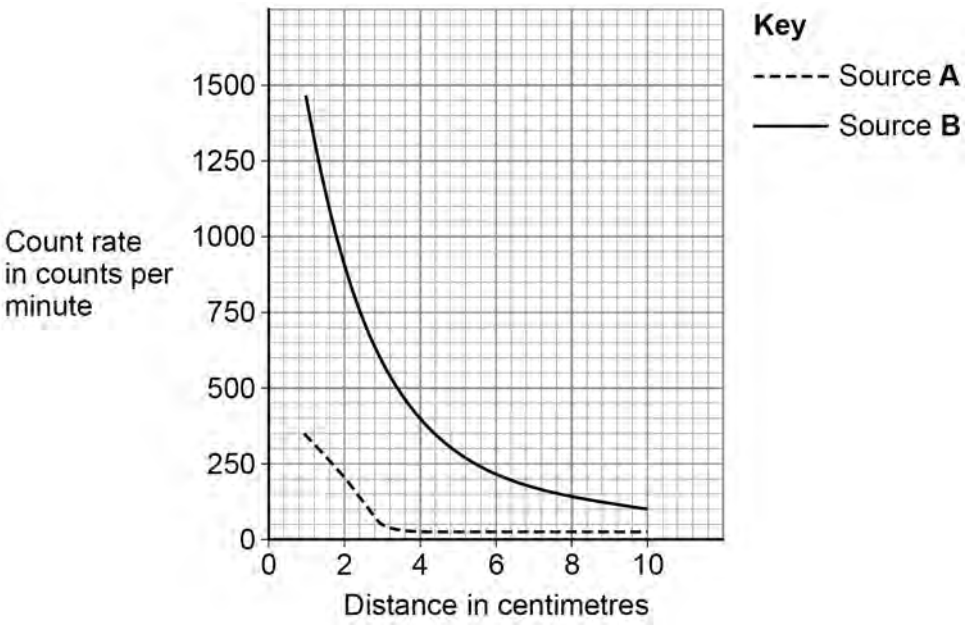
Figure 14



The teacher measured the count rate at different distances for each radioactive source.

Figure 15 shows the results.

Figure 15



4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 09 · continued

0 9 . 1 Explain how **Figure 15** shows that Source **A** only emits alpha radiation.

[3 marks]

0 9 . 2 **Figure 15** can **not** be used to determine if Source **B** emits beta radiation or gamma radiation.

Explain how an absorbing material could be used to show which type of radiation is emitted by Source **B**.

[2 marks]

Question 9 continues on the next page

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 09 · continued

The teacher took safety precautions during the experiment.

0 9 . 3 Suggest **one** safety precaution the teacher would have taken to reduce the radiation dose the teacher received.

[1 mark]

0 9 . 4 Suggest **one** safety precaution that the teacher would have taken to avoid becoming contaminated.

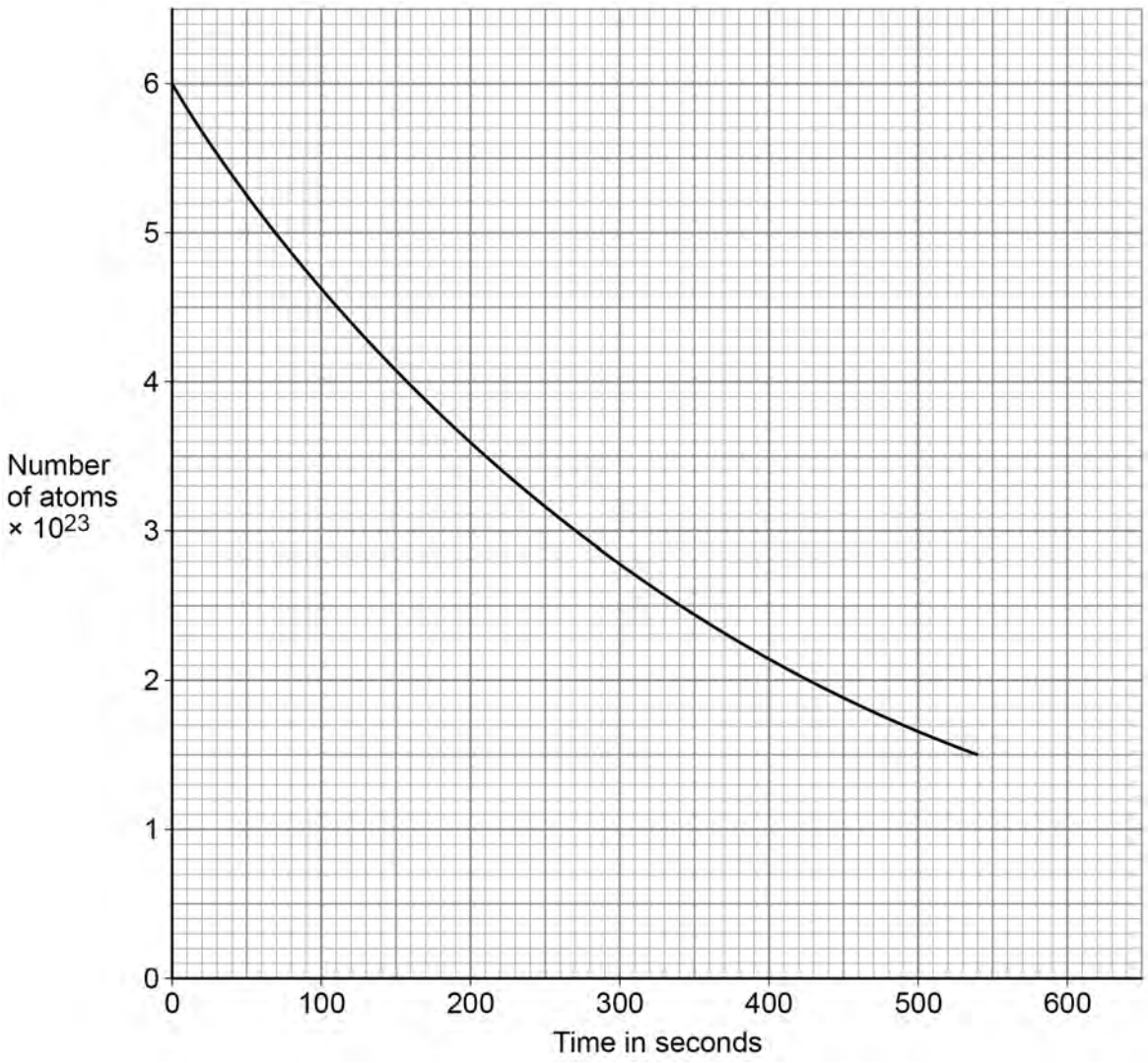
[1 mark]

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 09 · continued

0 9 . 5 **Figure 16** shows how the number of atoms of a radioactive element in a sample varied with time.

Figure 16



Activity is the rate at which a source of unstable nuclei decays.

Determine the activity of the radioactive sample at 300 seconds.

Give the unit.

[4 marks]

Activity = _____ Unit _____

11

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 10

June 2025 | 8463/1H | Original Q7

0 7 Some atoms emit radiation.

0 7 . 1 Why do scientists sometimes change the model used to describe the structure of the atom?

[1 mark]

Tick (✓) **one** box.

- Existing models use ideas that are old fashioned. ☐
- New evidence is discovered that existing models cannot explain. ☐
- Scientists need to develop new models every 100 years. ☐
- The public do not understand old models so new ones are created. ☐

0 7 . 2 When radioactivity was discovered, the dangers of radiation were not known.

Some scientists were irradiated and contaminated while working with the radioactive materials.

Describe the difference between irradiation and radioactive contamination.

[2 marks]

Question 7 continues on the next page

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

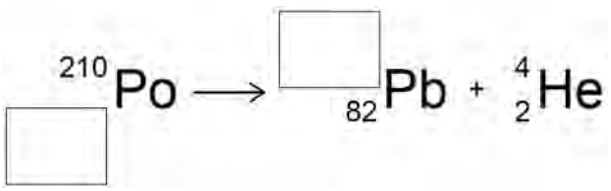
Question 10 · continued

0 7 . 3 Polonium-210 was one of the first radioactive elements to be discovered.

Polonium-210 (Po) decays into lead (Pb).

Complete the nuclear equation for polonium-210.

[2 marks]



$$^{210}_{\square}\mathrm{Po} \longrightarrow {}^{\square}_{82}\mathrm{Pb} + {}^{4}_{2}\mathrm{He}$$

0 7 . 4 Polonium-210 has a half-life of 138 days.

A sample of polonium contains 256 000 atoms.

Calculate the time taken for the number of polonium-210 atoms to reach 16 000.

[3 marks]

Time taken = _____ days

4.4.2.4 Radioactive contamination

Question 10 · continued

0 7 . 5 A sample of polonium contains equal numbers of polonium-209 atoms and polonium-210 atoms.

Polonium-209 has a half-life of 125 **years**.

Polonium-210 has a half-life of 138 **days**.

Explain how the activity of polonium-209 compares with the activity of polonium-210 in this sample.

[2 marks]

10

Turn over for the next question