

NASA Loses Space Materials

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON — Astronauts may have had the 'right stuff' to go to the moon, but when it comes to keeping track of what they brought back, NASA seems to have misplaced some of that stuff.

In a report issued by the agency's Inspector General on Thursday, NASA concedes that more than 500 pieces of moon rocks, meteorites, comet chunks and other space material were stolen or have been missing since 1970. That includes 218 moon samples that were stolen and later returned and about two dozen moon rocks and chunks of lunar soil that were reported lost last year.

NASA, which has loaned more than 26,000 samples, needs to keep better track of what's sent to researchers and museums, the report said. The lack of sufficient controls "increases the risk that these unique resources may be lost," the report concluded.

After last year's case of a missing moon sample loaned to a Delaware astronomical observatory — which the astronomer there claimed they returned to NASA — the agency's inspector general decided to audit about one quarter of the thousands of samples of moon rocks, lunar dust, meteorites, and other space material that the agency loaned.

Of those cases, 19 percent of the researchers either couldn't account for the samples or they had material that NASA records indicated had been destroyed or loaned to someone else. That included 22 meteorites and 2 comet samples from a daring mission that grabbed comet chunks.

In two cases, one researcher still had nine lunar samples he borrowed 35 years ago and another had 10 chunks of meteorites he kept for 14 years. Neither had ever worked on them. Another researcher had 36 moon samples and kept them for 16 years after he had finished his research.

The audit also unearthed records that listed hundreds of samples that no longer existed.

Survey Of Drivers Finds 2 In 10 Texting

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly 2 out of every 10 drivers and half of drivers ages 21 to 24 say they are texting behind the wheel, according to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey released Thursday.

The nationally representative survey questioned more than 6,000 drivers in November and December of 2010.

Among other survey findings: —When asked how they think their driving is different when talking on the phone or sending messages, about half of drivers said talking on a handheld device and one quarter said texting or sending messages makes no difference in their driving performance.

—Men and women are equally likely to make or accept phone calls, read incoming email or text messages and send messages while driving.

—Drivers younger than 25 are two to three times more likely than older drivers to read or send text messages or emails.

—There were very few situations when drivers would never talk on the phone or never send texts or emails while driving. Bad weather was the primary driving situation cited by half the drivers, and a quarter said bumper-to-bumper or fast-moving traffic would influence their decision not to place calls or send messages.

—The majority of drivers, 66 percent, indicated their most common action when receiving calls while driving is to answer and keep driving.

—Drivers under 25 are two to four times more likely than older drivers to avoid talking while driving when they see a police officer, but five times less likely to avoid talking while driving when merging with traffic.

—A higher share of women than men said they would never send texts while moving, 12 percent compared to 5 percent.

Va. Tech Gunman Kills Officer, Later Found Dead

BY ZINIE CHEN SAMPSON
AND ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — A gunman killed a police officer in a Virginia Tech parking lot Thursday and was found dead nearby in a baffling attack that sent shudders through the campus nearly five years after it was the scene of the deadliest shooting rampage in modern U.S. history.

The shooting took place on the same day Virginia Tech officials were in Washington, fighting a government fine over their alleged mishandling of the 2007 bloodbath.

Before it became clear that the gunman in Thursday's attack was dead, the school applied the lessons learned during the last tragedy, locking down the campus and using a high-tech alert system to warn students and faculty members to stay indoors.

The officer was killed after pulling a driver over in a traffic stop. The gunman — who was not involved in the traffic stop — walked into the parking lot and



shot the officer, Sgt. Robert Carpentieri said. Police wouldn't talk about a motive.

A law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity confirmed the gunman was dead, but wouldn't say how.

It appeared the gunman died about a quarter-mile away from

the traffic stop, in another school parking lot, where officials said a man was found dead with a gun nearby. While police at a news conference wouldn't confirm the second body was the gunman, Carpentieri said "you can kind of read between the lines."

The shooting prompted a lockdown that lasted for about four hours.

"Today, tragedy again struck Virginia Tech," said university president Charles Steger. "Our hearts are broken again."

The officer had served on the campus police force for four years. State police were still investigating whether he had been specifically targeted.

Students were preparing for exams were suddenly told to hunker down. Heavily armed officers walked around campus as caravans of SWAT vehicles and other police cars with emergency lights flashing patrolled nearby.

"A lot of people, especially toward the beginning were scared," said Jared Brumfield, a 19-year-old freshman from Culpeper, Va., who was locked in the Squires

Student Center since around 1:30 p.m.

The university sent updates about every 30 minutes, regardless of whether they had any new information, school spokesman Mark Owczarski said.

"It's crazy that someone would go and do something like that with all the stuff that happened in 2007," said Corey Smith, a 19-year-old sophomore from Mechanicsville, Va., who was headed to a dining hall near the site of one of the shootings.

He told The Associated Press that he stayed inside after seeing the alerts from the school. "It's just weird to think about why someone would do something like this when the school's had so many problems," Smith said.

Harry White, 20, a junior physics major, said he was in line for a sandwich at a restaurant in a campus building when he received the text message alert.

White said he didn't panic, thinking instead about a false alarm about a possible gunman that locked down the campus in August. White used an indoor

walkway to go to a computer lab in an adjacent building, where he checked news reports.

"I decided to just check to see how serious it was. I saw it's actually someone shooting someone, not something false, something that looks like a gun," White said.

Campus was quieter than usual because classes ended Wednesday and students were preparing for exams, which were to begin Friday. The school postponed those tests.

The shooting came soon after the conclusion of a hearing where Virginia Tech was appealing a \$55,000 fine by the U.S. Education Department in connection with the university's response to the 2007 rampage.

The department said the school violated the law by waiting more than two hours after two students were shot to death in their dorm before sending an email warning. By then, student gunman Seung-Hui Cho was chaining the doors to a classroom building where he killed 30 more people and then himself.

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