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X-rays: Where you least expect them

The next time you're unpeeling a few inches of sticky tape from a roll, think about this: You're also generating a burst of X-rays powerful enough to illuminate the bones in your fingers. That's what scientists at UCLA discovered when recording electromagnetic emissions from a roll of tape, using a machine to pull it at 3 centimeters per second.

The X-rays contained over a million photons, generating 15 kiloelectronvolts for one-billionth of a second.

The scientists theorize that the rays are produced because of the friction between the adhesive and the tape, building up until an electron jumps from one to the other. This creates enough energy to produce X-rays when the electron hits the tape. The researchers say the strength of the X-rays is sufficient for this to be a practical source for X-ray photography.