Real Life Safety Heroes: Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen

It's a technology that we all rely on but take for granted. It's the technology used to treat our workers after they hurt a limb, back, neck, hand, or foot. It's the technology used to protect us at airports, courthouses, and other public buildings. It's even the technology Superman uses to protect Truth, Justice, and "the American Way."

The technology is the x-ray, and it was discovered 135 years ago on November 8, 1895.

The man who discovered the x-ray was a shy and modest physicist named Wilhelm Röntgen. Born in Germany in 1845, Röntgen was an only child who loved reading and nature. At the tender age of three, the Röntgen family moved to Holland and Wilhelm was shipped off to boarding school. Nobody thought he was particularly bright. When he was 17, Wilhelm was kicked out of school for drawing an unflattering caricature of one of his teachers. In fact, the accusation was false. Another student did the drawing.

In 1865, Röntgen wanted to study physics at the University of Utrecht but was foiled by his lack of academic credentials. Undeterred, he got into the Polytechnic at Zurich by passing a highly technical exam. The rest, as they say, is history. Röntgen would thrive in his studies and become a leading professor of physics at the University of Munich.

X-ray technology is today used for a wide variety of workplace

safety purposes, including facility access control, security screening, and testing workers for bone and tissue injuries and exposure to respiratory hazards.