

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,  
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays June 24, 2003

From its humble beginnings as the Manhattan Project in the distant New Mexico desert, the nation's nuclear weapons program has always posed daunting security challenges. Today, the far-flung complex of warhead production plants, research laboratories, test facilities, and former weapons sites stands as an undeniably attractive target for spies and terrorists bent on using our own technologies against us.

Even before the attacks of September 11, 2001 forced a reevaluation of physical security standards and procedures, serious questions arose concerning lax management and a stubborn cultural antipathy to protective measures at sites housing plutonium and highly enriched uranium. In response, Congress established the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) as a semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy (DOE) to focus resources and high-level management attention on security mandates.

But creation of the NNSA failed to stem persistent reports of security lapses and inattentiveness to lingering vulnerabilities throughout the weapons complex. So the Subcommittee asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) to evaluate DOE and NNSA management of material safeguards and facility security programs. Of particular interest was how DOE assures contractor adherence to security policies.

The GAO findings released today lead to this sobering conclusion: The stern new realities of the post-9/11 world have been far too slow to penetrate the hardened bureaucratic maze of DOE offices, contractors and sites. It took two years for DOE to update the fundamental assessment governing nuclear weapons security – the Design Basis Threat or DBT. Formally adopted in May, the new, more stringent DBT will not be fully reflected in budget plans until 2005. Security enhancements demanded by the new DBT will not be completed before 2009, if then.

Even the process of completing the GAO study under discussion today was needlessly delayed by DOE refusal to provide access to drafts of the DBT; drafts openly relied upon to justify earlier budget submissions. DOE eventually provided the documents to Congress' audit agency, and we hope that level of cooperation will continue.

GAO also found a lack of clear roles and responsibilities among NNSA security offices, inconsistent assessments of contractor performance, potentially critical staff shortfalls and a failure to address the root causes of security lapses. As a result, neither the Department of Energy nor the NNSA can yet provide reasonable assurance weapons grade material is protected against a determined, well trained adversary force willing to die in a nuclear detonation or radiological dispersion of their own making.

This morning we will hear testimony on the process of updating and administering security standards at the nation's nuclear weapons complex. Classified elements of the security and safeguards program will be discussed at a closed session this afternoon.

Our witnesses today all bring impressive experience and important expertise to our continuing oversight of nuclear security. They also share a dedication to improved national security and public safety, and we look forward to a constructive dialogue on these important issues.