

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 1, 2005

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Over the past decade, there has been increasing concern that unsecured nuclear or radioactive material could fall into the hands of terrorists and be smuggled into the United States for use in a nuclear weapon or a “dirty bomb.” Part of the strategy to combat nuclear smuggling has been to deploy radiation detection equipment at both borders and ports domestically and abroad. This effort has also been coupled with training key security personnel (such as officials from the United States Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, Border Patrol, and Coast Guard) on the use of such equipment. Although the first line of defense for the United States is protecting nuclear material from theft at its source, utilizing the appropriate technology at U.S. and foreign borders and ports may provide additional detection and deterrence capabilities against illicit nuclear materials entering the United States for malevolent purposes.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) and our respective Committees have been extensively involved in evaluating U.S. programs to combat nuclear smuggling, including the development and deployment of radiation detectors at both U.S. and foreign borders and ports. Through hearings and reports, Congress and GAO have illustrated that four federal Departments – Defense, Energy, Homeland Security, and State (“Departments”) – develop and deploy radiation detection equipment both internationally and domestically. Both Congress and GAO have also reported on the lack of effective planning and coordination between these Departments regarding the development and effective use of this technology.

The Departments are also working with at least five national research and development laboratories (Pacific Northwest National Laboratories, Sandia National Laboratories, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, Los Alamos National Laboratories, and Brookhaven National Laboratories) (the “Laboratories”) to develop, test, and evaluate various radiation detection equipment. It is unclear what advantages we achieve by having so many laboratories involved in these disparate research efforts.

Our respective Committees are concerned about the potential for duplication of effort resulting from the current approach. For example, many of these laboratories have constructed, or are constructing, elaborate “test bed” facilities to evaluate the effectiveness of nuclear and radiation detection equipment. While we appreciate the value of competition in the research and

development process, we question whether the Laboratories share the results of their respective tests with each other, the Department of Homeland Security or other users of this technology in a timely and effective manner. Additionally, we are uncertain whether each laboratory needs their own testing facilities. We are concerned that despite multiple separate research efforts that many seemingly basic questions about the effectiveness and appropriate use of the nuclear/radiation detection equipment remain unanswered.

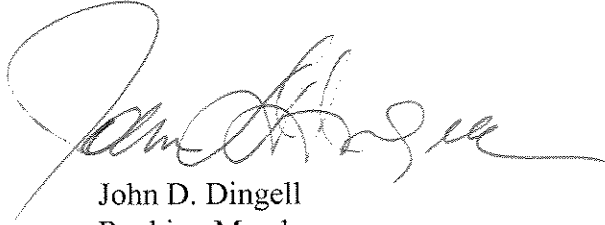
We ask GAO to continue assisting us in our oversight of these programs and over the Laboratories. Deploying the most effective nuclear/radiation detection equipment at the borders and ports is critical for our national security. We need to ensure that the newly-established Domestic Nuclear Detection Office and other federal agencies have the best available tools to prevent a nuclear or radiation attack on the United States. Specifically, we request that GAO examine the research, development, testing, and evaluation of radiation detection equipment at the Laboratories, focusing specifically on the following questions:

1. For each national laboratory, what efforts are currently underway to develop radiation detection technology? Who is sponsoring the work and at what cost? Who will be the eventual customer of the technology developed?
2. Please describe each testing facility in detail and the differences between each facility. What benefits, if any, are gained from having these multiple facilities?
3. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that these separate research efforts are appropriately coordinated from inception through completion of the projects?
4. In what ways are the results of testing conducted by the national laboratories at their various test beds being communicated to the potential users of radiation detection technology?
5. How is information obtained from the national laboratories during research, development, testing, and evaluation being used by agencies in making their procurement decisions?

If you have any questions regarding the matters we have raised, please contact us or have your staff contact Chris Knauer, Minority Investigator (202-226-3400), with the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce; Brian White, Professional Staff, U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (202-224-3721); Madelyn Creedon, Minority Counsel, U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (202-224-9338); Kathleen Kraninger, Professional Staff (202-224-2186), with the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; Michael Geffroy, Chief Counsel for Oversight (202-226-8417), or Al Thompson, Minority Professional Staff Member (202-226-2600) with the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security.

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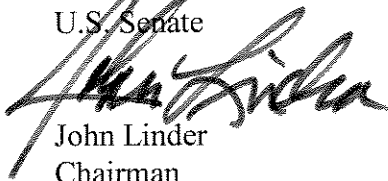
Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter and for your continuing efforts on homeland security.



John D. Dingell
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives



Susan M. Collins
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate



John Linder
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Prevention of Nuclear
and Biological Attack
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives

Sincerely,



Norm Coleman
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
U.S. Senate



Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
U.S. Senate



James R. Langevin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Prevention of Nuclear
and Biological Attack
Committee on Homeland Security
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