



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka
"Not a Matter of 'If', But of 'When':
The Status of U.S. Response Following an RDD Attack"
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
and
Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector
Preparedness and Integration**

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, held an oversight hearing today to examine the national level of preparedness to respond to a terrorist attack using a radiological dispersion device or “dirty bomb” and, in particular, at how the U.S. Department of Homeland Security coordinates with other agencies within the federal government, as well as coordination with and capabilities of regional, state and local governments to respond to a dirty bomb attack.

Witnesses at today’s hearing included Mr. Eugene Aloise, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, Government Accountability Office; Mr. Glenn M. Cannon, Assistant Administrator for Disaster Operations Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security; Dr. Steven Aoki, Deputy Undersecretary of Energy for Counterterrorism, National Nuclear Security Administration, Department of Energy; Dr. Kevin Yeskey, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Department of Health and Human Services; accompanied by Dr. Richard J. Hatchett, Associate Director for Radiation Countermeasure Research and Emergency Preparedness, National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease, Department of Health and Human Services; Mr. Thomas Dunne, Associate Administrator for Homeland Security, Environmental Protection Agency; Mr. Ken Murphy, Director, Oregon Department of Emergency Management; Mr. Wayne Tripp, Program Manager, Domestic Preparedness Equipment Technical Assistance Program; and Dr. Thomas Tenforde, President, National Council on Radiation Protection & Measurements.

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The following is Senator Akaka’s opening statement for the hearing:

Today's hearing is the latest in a series I have held over the last several years on various aspects of nuclear and radiological terrorism.

In March the OGM subcommittee examined U.S. programs underway to secure the highest risk radiological materials in other countries.

We will examine whether we are prepared to deal with a radiological attack. Detonating a dirty bomb in the U.S. is one of Al Qaeda's top goals, and we must be realistic about the consequences of such an attack.

Three aspects of our response concern me: first, the ability of Federal agencies to respond in a coordinated and effective way to a dirty bomb attack; second, if they have sufficient guidance to do so; and third, the technical capabilities of government agencies to take care of victims and to clean up contamination.

The goal of a dirty bomb attack is to create fear and to inflict economic damage. Having an effective Federal response, the resources to address peoples' fears, and the ability to mitigate and to reduce the economic damage from such an attack will make the consequences of a dirty bomb attack less severe.

Our first panel will examine whether or not the agencies of the Federal government are working together to be able effectively to respond to a terrorist attack involving a dirty bomb.

Even if the Federal response is well-coordinated, questions remain. Do agencies have the technical capabilities to conduct clean-up operations and to properly diagnose and care for those injured during such an attack? Are existing assets, such as radiation survey equipment, well protected so that they are available when we need them?

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses regarding the kinds of expertise they have in place, and what is needed to ensure our continued preparedness over the long term.

Also, in a report released in September 2006, the Government Accountability Office found that the Department of Energy may not be providing enough physical security for its fixed wing aircraft and helicopters which carry radiation survey equipment that could be used in the aftermath of a dirty bomb attack.

I look forward to hearing from DOE today about their measures to better protect their unique response capabilities. But, it is not enough to have these assets on the books – they must be available for use when they are needed.

Dr. Graham Allison, Director of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and a well-known expert in nuclear terrorism and arms control recently said "The security community agrees that there will be a dirty bomb attack on an American city at some point. The puzzle is why it hasn't happened yet, especially since the means and motives are readily available."

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Dr. Allison's comment puts a fine point on why Senator Pryor and I have convened this hearing. It is, as the hearing title indicates, not a question of if, but when a terrorist will succeed in

launching a dirty bomb attack on U.S. soil. We must be prepared for such an eventuality. We must also be proactive in our preparedness efforts. We cannot afford to wait for another Katrina-scale disaster to force changes and make fixes in our ability to respond to a catastrophe.

Federal government agencies such as DHS, DOE, EPA and HHS must work together on a routine basis to hammer out the practical considerations involved in deploying a coordinated response to a dirty bomb attack. And DHS must, in its lead role, work to ensure that the agencies listed in the nuclear and radiological incident annex of the national response plan have clear guidance and are able to conduct the requisite medical and environmental analyses. If these capabilities are found to be lacking, they should be bolstered. If the expertise falls short, it must be supplemented. Anything less cannot be acceptable.