

Opening Statement of
Senator Tom Carper
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has a monumental responsibility, and I can say with confidence they fulfill that responsibility admirably in most cases.

When I was Governor I would often tell my cabinet heads, "if it isn't perfect, make it better."

When it comes to regulating the nuclear industry - from construction gauges to nuclear power plants- NRC has to be perfect.

As the chair of the Clean Air and Nuclear Safety Subcommittee, oversight of the NRC is one of my top priorities.

In that capacity, I have closely monitored the NRC's efforts to gear up for a renaissance in new nuclear power, and I have often warned the NRC that they can not lose sight of their current responsibilities while preparing to deal with the enormous task of licensing a new fleet of nuclear power plants.

When the NRC fails as significantly as this, it shakes the public's confidence. I believe safe, reliable, new nuclear power is one of the keys to our nation's energy security and climate change concerns.

However, a lack of public confidence in the NRC will undermine that opportunity before it even starts.

This incident coupled with the nuclear fuel spill last year which was inexplicably kept from Congress for over a year, can not be ignored nor simply brushed aside as small events that we hope will not happen again.

Because this is not just about public confidence in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and nuclear power.

This is about Public Safety.

When I think about this episode, what's most distressing to me is the fact that we should have known better.

Experts have been warning us for years now about the impact a dirty bomb exploding in an American city would have. There would be loss of life, of course, but the long-term impact such an incident would have on the economic and physical health of the

community that was targeted are likely immeasurable.

The psychological impact a dirty bomb explosion would have not only on the community that was hit but on the nation as a whole cannot be discounted either.

We can open the paper and turn on the news every day and see the impact conventional explosives placed in a backpack or in the trunk of a car have had in communities like Great Britain, Spain, Israel, and Iraq.

Just imagine what would happen if those explosives were coupled with radiological materials.

The fact is that a dirty bomb is likely the worst terrorist threat we face as a nation today and one of our major lines of defense against them did not hold up when tested. Luckily, this test was not a real one and, hopefully, we can learn from the mistakes that were made.