

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

"Dirty Bomb Vulnerabilities:
Fake Companies, Fake Licenses, Real Consequences"

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
July 12, 2007

★ ★ ★

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I have had the privilege of working with members of this Subcommittee, particularly Senator Coleman, on bipartisan measures to strengthen security at our borders and at our seaports.

We have made real progress in preventing terrorists, explosives, biological and chemical weapons, and radioactive materials from penetrating our defenses.

Those gains will avail us little, however, if home-grown terrorists can readily acquire deadly materials within our borders to fuel their attacks. The enterprising work of Government Accountability Office investigators suggests that they could do exactly that with relative ease.

The threat of a "dirty bomb" seeded with radioactive materials is widely recognized. The former head of Britain's MI-5 intelligence service has said it is "only a matter of time" before a dirty-bomb attack strikes a country in the West.

But we are not the only people feeling threatened: The Chinese government has included a dirty-bomb drill in its security planning for the 2008 Olympics.

The consequences could be dire. A 2004 study published by the National Defense University concludes that a dirty-bomb attack "is apt to cause mass panic and great economic damage," even if it is unlikely to cause mass fatalities. A new Canadian government study concludes that exploding even a small dirty bomb in Ottawa could cause over \$20 billion in economic disruption, in addition to localized death and destruction.

If it is indeed a relatively simple matter to obtain, alter, or counterfeit Nuclear Regulatory Commission licenses to acquire radioactive materials, then we face yet another challenge to achieving homeland security for our people.

The GAO deserves great credit for giving us concrete evidence of this vulnerability. I am eager to learn more about the GAO's investigation and recommendations for improvement.

#