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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-375](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 11, 2001, concern has increased that terrorists could smuggle nuclear weapons or materials into this country in the approximately 7 million containers that arrive annually at U.S. seaports. Nuclear materials can be smuggled across borders by being placed inside containers aboard cargo ships. In response to this concern, since 2003, the Department of Energy (DOE) has deployed radiation detection equipment to key foreign seaports through its Megaports Initiative (Initiative). GAO examined the (1) progress DOE has made in implementing the Initiative, (2) current and expected costs of the Initiative, and (3) challenges DOE faces in installing radiation detection equipment at foreign ports.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOE (1) develop a comprehensive long-term plan for the Initiative that identifies, among other things, criteria for deciding how many and which lower priority ports to complete if DOE continues to have difficulties initiating work at its highest priority ports and (2) reevaluate the current per port cost estimate and adjust long-term cost projections as necessary. DOE concurred with our recommendations. DOE is working on a plan for the Initiative and will reevaluate its cost estimate at the end of fiscal year 2005.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-375.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3841 or aloise@gao.gov.

PREVENTING NUCLEAR SMUGGLING

DOE Has Made Limited Progress in Installing Radiation Detection Equipment at Highest Priority Foreign Seaports

What GAO Found

DOE's Megaports Initiative has had limited success in initiating work at seaports identified as high priority by DOE's Maritime Prioritization Model, which ranks ports in terms of their relative attractiveness to potential nuclear smugglers. Gaining the cooperation of foreign governments has been difficult in part because some countries have concerns that screening large volumes of containers will create delays that could inhibit the flow of commerce at their ports. DOE has completed work at 2 ports and signed agreements to initiate work at 5 other ports. Additionally, DOE is negotiating agreements with the governments of 18 additional countries and DOE officials told us they are close to signing agreements with 5 of these countries. However, DOE does not have a comprehensive long-term plan to guide the Initiative's efforts. Developing such a plan would lead DOE to, among other things, determine criteria for deciding how many and which lower priority ports to complete if it continues to have difficulties working at higher volume and higher threat ports of interest.

Through the end of fiscal year 2004, DOE had spent about \$43 million on Megaports Initiative activities. Of this amount, about \$14 million was spent on completing installations at 2 ports. Although DOE currently plans to install equipment at a total of 20 ports by 2010, at an estimated cost of \$337 million, this cost projection is uncertain for several reasons. For example, the projection is based in part on DOE's \$15 million estimate for the average cost per port, which may not be accurate because it was based primarily on DOE's work at Russian land borders, airports, and seaports. Additionally, DOE is currently assessing whether the Initiative's scope should increase beyond 20 ports; if this occurs, total costs and time frames will also increase.

DOE faces several operational and technical challenges in installing radiation detection equipment at foreign ports. For example, DOE is currently devising ways to overcome technical challenges posed by the physical layouts and cargo stacking configurations at some ports. Additionally, environmental conditions, such as high winds and sea spray, can affect radiation detection equipment's performance and sustainability.

DOE-Funded Radiation Detection Equipment at a Foreign Port



Source: GAO.