

Highlights of [GAO-05-611](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

A successful terrorist attack on a Department of Energy (DOE) site containing nuclear weapons material could have devastating effects for the site and nearby communities. DOE's Office of the Under Secretary for Energy, Science and Environment (ESE), which is responsible for DOE operations in areas such as energy research, manages five sites that contain weapons-grade nuclear material. A heavily armed paramilitary force equipped with such items as automatic weapons protects ESE sites. GAO was asked to examine (1) the extent to which ESE protective forces are meeting DOE's existing readiness requirements and (2) the actions DOE and ESE will need to take to successfully defend against the terrorist threat identified in the October 2004 design basis threat (DBT) by DOE's implementation deadline of October 2008.

What GAO Recommends

To ensure that DOE and ESE protective forces can meet the terrorist threat contained in the 2004 DBT, GAO is making five recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to, among other things, address weaknesses with protective officers' equipment and coordinate ESE efforts to address the 2004 DBT. DOE concurred with the report, accepted GAO's recommendations and provided an update on actions it anticipated taking to address GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-611.

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 AloiseE@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR SECURITY

DOE's Office of the Under Secretary for Energy, Science and Environment Needs to Take Prompt, Coordinated Action to Meet the New Design Basis Threat

What GAO Found

Protective forces at the five ESE sites containing weapons-grade nuclear material generally meet existing key DOE readiness requirements. Specifically, GAO determined that ESE protective forces generally comply with DOE standards for firearms proficiency, physical fitness levels, and equipment standardization and that the five ESE sites had the required training programs, facilities, and equipment. However, GAO did find some weaknesses at ESE sites that could adversely affect the ability of ESE protective forces to defend their sites. For example, despite the importance of training exercises in which protective forces undergo simulated attacks by a group of mock terrorists (force-on-force exercises), DOE neither sets standards for individual protective force officers to participate in these exercises, nor does it require sites to track individual participation. In another example, GAO found that protective force officers at all five of the ESE sites reported problems with their radio communications systems. Specifically, according to 66 of the 105 protective force officers GAO interviewed, they did not always have dependable radio communications as required by the DOE Manual 473.2-2, *Protective Force Program Manual*. Security officials stated that improvements were under way.

To successfully defend against the larger terrorist threat contained in the 2004 DBT by October 2008, DOE and ESE officials recognize that they will need to take several prompt and coordinated actions. These include transforming its current protective force into an "elite force"—modeled on U.S. Special Forces, developing and deploying new security technologies to reduce the risk to protective forces in case of an attack, consolidating and eliminating nuclear weapons material between and among ESE sites to reduce security costs, and creating a sound ESE management structure that has sufficient authority to ensure coordination across all ESE offices that have weapons-grade nuclear material. However, because these initiatives, particularly an elite force, are in early stages of development and will require significant commitment of resources and coordination across DOE and ESE, their completion by the 2008 October DBT implementation deadline is uncertain.

DOE Protective Force Member



Source: DOE.