



Highlights of [GAO-04-773T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

A successful terrorist attack on Department of Energy (DOE) sites containing nuclear weapons or the material used in nuclear weapons could have devastating consequences for the site and its surrounding communities. Because of these risks, DOE needs an effective safeguards and security program. A key component of an effective program is the design basis threat (DBT), a classified document that identifies, among other things, the potential size and capabilities of terrorist forces. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, rendered the then-current DBT obsolete, resulting in DOE issuing a new version in May 2003.

GAO (1) identified why DOE took almost 2 years to develop a new DBT, (2) analyzed the higher threat in the new DBT, and (3) identified remaining issues that need to be resolved in order for DOE to meet the threat contained in the new DBT.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-773T.

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

NUCLEAR SECURITY

DOE Must Address Significant Issues to Meet the Requirements of the New Design Basis Threat

What GAO Found

DOE took a series of actions in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. While each of these has been important, in and of themselves, they are not sufficient to ensure that all of DOE's sites are adequately prepared to defend themselves against the higher terrorist threat present in the post September 11, 2001 world. Specifically, GAO found:

- DOE took almost 2 years to develop a new DBT because of (1) delays in developing an intelligence community assessment—known as the Postulated Threat—of the terrorist threat to nuclear weapon facilities, (2) DOE's lengthy comment and review process for developing policy, and (3) sharp debates within DOE and other government organizations over the size and capabilities of future terrorist threats and the availability of resources to meet these threats.
- While the May 2003 DBT identifies a larger terrorist threat than did the previous DBT, the threat identified in the new DBT, in most cases, is less than the threat identified in the intelligence community's Postulated Threat, on which the DBT has been traditionally based. The new DBT identifies new possible terrorist acts such as radiological, chemical, or biological sabotage. However, the criteria that DOE has selected for determining when facilities may need to be protected against these forms of sabotage may not be sufficient. For example, for chemical sabotage, the 2003 DBT requires sites to protect to "industry standards;" however, such standards currently do not exist. In response to these concerns, DOE has recently agreed to reexamine some of the key aspects and assumptions of the May 2003 DBT.
- DOE has been slow to resolve a number of significant issues, such as issuing additional DBT implementation guidance, developing DBT implementation plans, and developing budgets to support these plans, that may affect the ability of its sites to fully meet the threat contained in the new DBT in a timely fashion. Consequently, DOE's deadline to meet the requirements of the new DBT by the end of fiscal year 2006 is probably not realistic for some sites.