



Highlights of [GAO-04-894T](#), a testimony to Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

A successful terrorist attack on Department of Energy (DOE) sites containing the material used in nuclear weapons, called special nuclear material, 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 examined the issues that could impede the ability of DOE's Office of Energy, Science and Environment to fully meet the threat contained in the May 2003 DBT by the department's fiscal year 2006 deadline.

NUCLEAR SECURITY

Several Issues Could Impede the Ability of DOE's Office of Energy, Science and Environment to Meet the May 2003 Design Basis Threat

What GAO Found

Five Office of Energy, Science and Environment sites contain substantial quantities of Category I special nuclear material, which consists of specified quantities of plutonium and highly enriched uranium. These sites have all developed plans for implementing the May 2003 DBT. However, there are several issues that could make it difficult to implement these plans by DOE's deadline of the end of fiscal year 2006. Specifically:

- Office of Energy, Science and Environment sites approved their DBT implementations plans in February 2004 before the Deputy Secretary of Energy issued his April 2004 guidance on which sites had improvised nuclear device vulnerabilities. As a result, some sites may be required to shift to enhanced protection strategies, which could be very costly. Consequently, the assumptions in the Office of Energy, Science and Environment DBT implementation plans may no longer be valid, and the plans may need to be revised.
- Office of Energy, Science and Environment site plans are based on the May 2003 DBT; however, DOE is now reexamining the May 2003 DBT and may revise it. Consequently, if the DBT is changed in a way that increases security requirements, some Office of Energy, Science and Environment sites may have to revise their implementation plans to reflect the need to provide for a more stringent defense.
- The plan for one Office of Energy, Science and Environment site was under funded. Specifically, officials in the Office of Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology, which is part of the Office of Energy, Science and Environment, told GAO that, for one site, no DBT implementation funding had been requested for fiscal year 2005.
- Finally, full implementation of these plans will require the successful resolution of complex organizational arrangements between various program and security offices.

Consequently, GAO continues to believe, as it recommended in April 2004, that DOE needs to develop and implement a departmentwide, multiyear, fully resourced implementation plan for meeting the new DBT requirements that includes important programmatic activities such as the closure of facilities and the transportation of special nuclear materials.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-894T.

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.