



Highlights of [GAO-09-257](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In April 2005, the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) was established within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to enhance and coordinate federal, state, and local efforts to combat nuclear smuggling domestically and overseas. DNDO was directed to develop, in coordination with the departments of Defense (DOD), Energy (DOE), and State (State), a global strategy for nuclear detection—a system of radiation detection equipment and interdiction activities domestically and abroad. GAO was asked to examine (1) DNDO's progress in developing programs to address critical gaps in preventing nuclear smuggling domestically, (2) DNDO's role in supporting other agencies' efforts to combat nuclear smuggling overseas, and (3) the amount budgeted by DHS, DOD, DOE, and State for programs that constitute the global nuclear detection strategy. To do so, GAO analyzed agency documents; interviewed agency, state, and local officials; and visited select pilot program locations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS (1) develop a plan for the domestic part of the global strategy, and (2) in coordination with DOD, DOE, and State, use the Joint Annual Interagency Review to guide future strategic efforts to combat nuclear smuggling. GAO also has two recommendations related to maritime planning. DHS did not directly comment on the recommendations, but said they aligned with DNDO's efforts.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-257](#). For more information, contact David Maurer at (202) 512-3841 or maurerd@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR DETECTION

Domestic Nuclear Detection Office Should Improve Planning to Better Address Gaps and Vulnerabilities

What GAO Found

DNDO has made some progress in strengthening radiation detection capabilities to address critical gaps and vulnerabilities in combating nuclear smuggling, which include the land border area between ports of entry into the United States, aviation, and small maritime vessels. However, DNDO is still in the early stages of program development, and has not clearly developed long term plans, with costs and time frames, for achieving its goal of closing these gaps by expanding radiological and nuclear detection capabilities. For example, DNDO and Customs and Border Protection have been collaborating on radiological and nuclear detection options to better secure the land borders between ports of entry. However, DNDO-sponsored field evaluations to test radiation detection equipment are still not complete and DNDO and CBP may not have all radiation detection equipment in place until 2012. In addition, DNDO is in the first year of a 3-year maritime pilot program, working with the Coast Guard and local law enforcement agencies in the Puget Sound, Washington, area to field test equipment and to develop radiological and nuclear screening procedures. However, DNDO has made little progress in (1) developing criteria for assessing the success of the pilot to help determine whether it should be expanded to other locations, and (2) resolving some of the challenges it faces in the pilot program, such as technological limitations of the detection equipment and sustaining current detection efforts.

Although DNDO has no authority over other federal agencies' programs to combat radiological and nuclear smuggling overseas, it has worked with DOD, DOE, and State to provide subject matter expertise and exchange lessons learned on radiological and nuclear detection. However, most of DNDO's efforts are modest in scope, reflecting the fact that these agencies have well-established programs to combat nuclear smuggling. For example, DNDO has been working with State's Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism to develop model guidelines that other nations can use to establish their own nuclear detection programs.

According to DNDO, approximately \$2.8 billion was budgeted by DHS, DOD, DOE, and State in fiscal year 2007 for programs included in the global strategy for nuclear detection. Of this amount, approximately \$1.1 billion was budgeted for programs to combat nuclear smuggling overseas, \$1.1 billion was budgeted for nuclear detection programs at the U.S. border and within the United States, and approximately \$577 million was budgeted to fund cross-cutting activities, such as providing technical support to users of the radiation detection equipment. DNDO collected budget data and published them in the Joint Annual Interagency Review, an annual report required by Congress. DOD, DOE, and State officials told GAO that this information is used primarily as a status report of individual programs to combat nuclear smuggling. It is not used as a tool to help plan for or inform the future direction of the strategy or to help establish current or future priorities.