

CHEMICAL FACILITIES VULNERABLE Operations Present Control Problems; Alert System Must Be Improved

WASHINGTON, Dec. 23, 2003 – Although nuclear power plants have garnered the most attention as potential targets for terrorist strikes, it is chemical facilities that pose the greatest vulnerability and need to be fortified to safeguard against terrorist attacks, according to a CSIS report that has been posted on the Center’s Web site (www.csis.org).

CSIS has posted “Silent Vector: Issues of Concern and Policy Recommendations,” (http://www.csis.org/isp/sv/SV_issues.pdf) as a follow up to the *Silent Vector* simulation it conducted in October 2002. The *Silent Vector* tabletop exercise simulated a terrorist attack on energy infrastructure on the east coast of the United States. With the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), CSIS hosted a follow-up seminar series this fall, where experts and practitioners from government, industry and academia participated and collaborated to examine key issues and challenges that were highlighted during the *Silent Vector* drill. The series focused on four key areas: aviation, nuclear power, alerting and warning, and the chemical industry.

Chemical Facilities

“*Silent Vector* participants quickly focused on chemical facilities as perhaps the most vulnerable and potentially most destructive targets in a terrorist attack,” the report states. “The chemical industry presents a very complex control problem because of the multiple producers, transporters, and storage locations, both public and private, spread across the nation.” According to the General Accounting Office (GAO), there are at least 123 chemical facilities within the United States, which could each produce 1 million casualties if attacked. Seminar participants made the following recommendations:

- **Identify high-risk facilities based on factors including the level of threat and collect information on industry security and preparedness**
- **Specify the roles and responsibilities of each federal agency partnering with the chemical industry**
- **Develop appropriate information-sharing mechanisms**
- **Legislative proposal:** Develop a legislative proposal, in consultation with industry and other appropriate groups, to require chemical facilities to expeditiously assess their vulnerability to terrorist attacks, and, where necessary, require these facilities to take corrective action.

Communication

“It became clear that notifying the public and private industries in this type of situation would much more complicated than simply raising the threat level on the color-code Homeland Security Advisory System (HLSAS),” the report states. “Warnings need to be tailored to specific areas and instructions on protective action responses provided . . . No single communication system will suffice.” The participants recommended that they United States:

- **Develop a national warning system:** “The federal government must develop and promulgate a national warning strategy to guide both public- and private-sector efforts to improve warnings for all hazards, including terrorism. In the absence of such guidance, the private sector will continue to move forward on its own in an uncoordinated fashion, with businesses proceeding to sell solutions where viable.”
- **Designate DHS as lead for warnings related to terrorist attacks.**
- **Grant authority to activate Emergency Alert System (EAS):** “The Secretary of Homeland Security should receive authority to activate the EAS. This would provide flexibility in event that the president cannot be reached quickly or is unavailable for immediate consultation regarding a breaking crisis, thus allowing for more timely warnings.”
- **Require mandatory local EAS plans:** “DHS and the FCC should work together to reach agreement on making development of state and local EAS plans mandatory rather than voluntary.”

Aviation

“Roundtable participants believed that the most important function of the federal government is to be able to inform the

aviation industry of plausible likely threats, not generic hypothetical warnings. Many of the warnings being issued by the government are too general and too vague to be helpful,” the report states. “In the course of preparation for the exercise, however, CSIS analysts determined that general aviation and air cargo operations still represent substantial vulnerabilities.”

Recommendations:

- **Develop an integrated watch list:** “The Transportation and Security Administration (TSA) should place the highest priority on assembling an integrated watch list, based on the various watch lists developed by the security agencies of the federal government.”
- **Update aircraft registry system:** “The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the TSA should update their aircraft registry system, placing first priority on assembling commercially available data from a wide range of sources so as to develop a ‘virtual’ registry database that is useful for law enforcement purposes in emergency situations.”
- **Screen new pilots:** “Before being granted a pilot certificate, all prospective candidates should be screened against the integrated watch list.”

Nuclear Power:

“Nuclear power plants have security features and procedures that anticipate hostile action as well as accidental phenomena,” the report states. “Nuclear power plants are among the most security-conscious facilities in the United States. Each has installed extensive threat protection features. Clearly, standards can weaken over time, so it is crucial to continue to exercise vigilance over security procedures for these facilities both within the industry and by its regulators.”

The report concludes, “In both general and specific terms, homeland security needs to be a disciplined process that balances risk, cost, and probability . . . It must be the product of specific management discipline. The federal government has an obligation to promote a disciplined approach to homeland security, one that is adopted by the private sector because it is balanced and reasoned. We are currently a far distance from this sensible approach, but the trends are in the right direction.”

CSIS is an independent, nonpartisan public policy research organization.