

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

August 23, 2022

The Honorable Christopher T. Hanson
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Mail Stop O-16, B33
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Hanson:

We write to urge the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to take immediate actions to address vulnerabilities in its controls for purchases of radioactive material, as identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). These actions include strengthening NRC's licensing verification procedures and adding security features to its licensing process, which would help prevent illegitimate purchases of radiological material by terrorists and other bad actors.¹

As you are aware, GAO completed a covert investigation to test the rigor of NRC's radioactive material security controls. Troublingly, GAO successfully created fake companies and forged licenses to procure Category 3 sources of radioactive material from two domestic vendors. Notably, the domestic vendors followed all of NRC's requirements in selling the radioactive material to GAO.

In certain quantities, Category 3 sources of radioactive material could cause billions of dollars in socioeconomic costs if used in a dirty bomb. The possibility of nefarious actors being able to buy such dangerous quantities of radiological material should be a call to immediate action. The threat is real – a recent publication by the Terrorgram Collective, a Racially and Ethnically Motivated Extremist group, claimed that dirty bombs are the “holy grail of terrorism” and provided rough instructions on manufacturing a device using uranium ore.² As law enforcement has recently been under threats of violence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security have observed calls for using dirty bombs against law enforcement, including suggesting the placement of one in front of FBI Headquarters.³ Moreover, officials from the National Nuclear Security Administration have assessed that bad actors are showing an increasing interest in making dirty bombs.⁴

While we recognize NRC has taken steps to expedite a rulemaking to improve verification of licenses and communicate with manufacturers about vulnerabilities, this process will still take too

¹ *Preventing a Dirty Bomb: Vulnerabilities Persist in NRC's Controls for Purchases of High-Risk Radioactive Material*, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, (GAO-22-103441), July 2022.

² (UNCLASSIFIED/FOUO) *Neo-Nazi Accelerationist Publication “The Hard Reset” Focuses on Sabotage and Attacks on Critical Infrastructure*, NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER, July 2022.

³ (UNCLASSIFIED/FOUO) *Violent Threats Against Federal Law Enforcement, Courts, and Government Personnel and Facilities Following Court-Authorized Search*, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION AND DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, August 2022.

⁴ *Preventing a Dirty Bomb: Vulnerabilities Persist in NRC's Controls for Purchases of High-Risk Radioactive Material*, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, (GAO-22-103441), July 2022.

long given the nature of the threat. The NRC has the authority to take immediate action to address known security gaps, and we urge you to use this authority to implement GAO's recommendations without further delay.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security



JOHN KATKO
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce



MICHAEL GUEST
Vice Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



RITCHIE TORRES
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