

FIND IT

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Quick News Search                |   |
| <input type="text"/>             |  |
| <a href="#">Adv. News Search</a> |   |

- [Browse Dispositions](#)
- [Browse Obituaries](#)
- [Browse Police Logs](#)
- [Search Classified](#)
- [Search Yellow Pages](#)
- [Help & How to](#)
- [Web Site Map](#)
- [What's New](#)

SECTIONS

- [Beliefs](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Editorial](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Food & Dining](#)
- [Health/Science](#)
- [Home & Garden](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Military](#)
- [Neighbors](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Perspective/Editorial](#)
- [Police Logs](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Weather](#)

ABOUT US

- [Subscribe to The Day](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Web FAQs](#)
- [Feedback](#)
- <http://www.theday.com/campus/careercntr.asp>
- [Our Services](#)
- [The Day's History](#)

[Go Back](#)

[Printer-Friendly version](#)

Featured in [Politics](#)

# Nuclear plant security bill unnecessary, NRC claims

*Commission wants Congress to reject proposed changes*

By [Paul Choiniere](#) - [More Articles](#)  
Published on 12/04/2001

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is urging Congress to reject a nuclear-plant security bill introduced by several senators, including Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., calling it a piecemeal approach that is too costly and, in many respects, unnecessary.

“The commission strongly opposes enactment of the legislation as drafted,” wrote NRC Chairman Richard A. Meserve in a letter to Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nevada.

Provisions in the bill include replacing private security forces at nuclear plants with federal officers, creating a new Operations Safeguard Response Unit within NRC to handle security issues, and ordering a review of nuclear plant designs to see if structural improvements are needed to handle potential terrorist attacks.

Lieberman has argued that in light of the Sept. 11 attacks major changes are needed in the way the country goes about protecting nuclear plants.

“While the NRC and the nation's nuclear facilities — including Millstone 2 and 3 in my home state of Connecticut — have taken some steps to improve security, much more needs to be done to reduce the vulnerabilities of our nuclear plants to terrorist strikes,” said Lieberman in announcing the proposal last week.

Kelly Moore, a spokesman for the senator, said he remains convinced the proposed legislation is a reasonable response to the heightened threat the nation now faces.

Given the commission's unqualified opposition, the bill could face a difficult fight. The Nuclear Energy Institute, the lobbying arm of the nuclear industry, is also working to defeat the legislation.

In his letter, Meserve calls it a mistake to separate strategy for the security of nuclear facilities from other potential infrastructure targets, such as chemical plants, dams and refineries. It would be better to have a comprehensive security plan, he contends.

“Resources are not infinite, and disproportionate protection at one kind of facility may increase the risks at other kinds of facilities,” he stated.

The letter also notes that the commission is doing a “top-to-bottom review” of security requirements. It is premature to propose changes until that review is complete, Meserve argues in the letter.

Neil A. Sheehan, an NRC spokesman, said a task force recently filed a report on the review with the commission, but that a final proposal for improving security will not be in place “until well into next year.”

Former President Bill Clinton appointed Meserve to the NRC chairmanship in 1999. In the late 1970s Meserve served as the science and technology advisor during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, also a Democrat.

Some of the letter's strongest language is targeted at the idea of introducing federal security officers at nuclear plants. It states the proposal "addresses a nonexistent problem."

"Current security forces at sensitive NRC nuclear facilities are well trained, well paid, and have high retention rates. This is in sharp contrast to airport security," stated Meserve. "There have been no failures in nuclear plant security of the type that has plagued the commercial airline industry and thus no need for such radical change."

Congress recently voted to begin using federal security officers to screen passengers and packages at commercial airports.

Putting the NRC in the business of providing security for nuclear plants would interfere with its role as an objective regulator, Meserve stated. It would require hiring more than 7,000 new federal workers, twice the number of staff now employed by the NRC, and could cost more than \$1 billion a year.

Some of the same arguments are being stated by the nuclear industry.

Joe F. Colvin, president and chief executive officer of the Nuclear Energy Institute, called the bill "well intentioned, but misguided."

"This proposal is a reflexive political response to a problem that does not exist," Colvin said. "Nuclear power plants are private facilities protected by a paramilitary force of highly-trained, well-armed, dedicated professionals."

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Wheels](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Travel](#) | [Sci-Tech](#) | [Business](#) | [Region](#) | [LifeStyle](#)

© 1998-2001 The Day Publishing Co.

[FAQs](#) | [E-Mail](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Usage](#)