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HOMELAND INSECURITY

U.N. sponsors Arab tours  
of U.S. nuclear reactors  
'Field trips' part of training course  
taught by Energy Department lab

By Paul Sperry  
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WASHINGTON -- To help fight nuclear terrorism, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham last month pledged \$1.2 million in additional funds to a United Nations agency that sponsors foreign nationals -- including some from Arab terrorist states -- to tour U.S. nuclear reactors.

The tours are part of a little-known federal course that trains foreign nationals in security techniques used at U.S. nuclear sites.

Security experts from Sandia National Laboratory, one of the Energy Department's three nuclear-weapons research labs, teach the two-week course every other spring.

Despite the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the course will be offered again this spring, a lab spokesman told WorldNetDaily.

"Plans remain in place for the International Training Course to be offered April 28 through May 16," said Rod Geer of Sandia.

Under a nuclear nonproliferation law signed by President Carter, Energy is obligated to share physical-protection technology with the [133 member states of the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency](#), which is headed by Mohamed el-Baradei and based in Vienna, Austria.

Six of IAEA's members -- Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Cuba and Sudan -- show up on the State Department's terrorist blacklist. Afghanistan also is a member.

Since 1978, Albuquerque, N.M.-based Sandia has presented the course 14 times to more than 400 participants from 57 countries, Geer says.

Islamic countries represented include Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, says Sandia's Basil Steele, a course instructor.

"We have everybody coming here," he said, with the last group passing through in May 2000.

The international security classes, which used to run three weeks, are held at the Marriott Hotel in Albuquerque. They cover sensors, cameras, entry and access controls, response-force communications and other methods to protect nuclear facilities and materials from sabotage or theft.

After classes, participants are taken on "field trips" to some of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's facilities, Steele says.

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--Former senior official  
at U.S. Department of  
Energy

**A  
spokeswoman  
in IAEA's New  
York office  
acknowledges  
the risk of  
sharing  
security  
techniques**

"They go out to an NRC site to tour it, to see security there, and understand how they practice security," he said.

Steele would not name the nuclear-reactor sites they visit, other than to say they're west of New Mexico.

Palo Verde nuclear-power plant in Arizona is the closest to New Mexico. It's one of 86 nuclear sites protected by a no-fly zone recently ordered by the Federal Aviation Administration in the wake of the hijackings.

A spokeswoman in IAEA's New York office acknowledges the risk of sharing security techniques with potential Arab terrorists, who may be using the U.N. invitation only to scout U.S. nuclear facilities for weak areas to penetrate.

But she says the agency weighs that against the benefit of helping foreign nationals safeguard nuclear materials in their countries from terrorists (even though some of the countries themselves sponsor and harbor terrorists).

She says IAEA does not blackball any member from participating, and provides rosters of participants to Energy.

"We encourage our member states who host such meetings to allow entry for *all* nationalities," she asserted.

Steele says Energy does not vet the rosters for suspected terrorists.

"It's up to IAEA to screen their participants," he said.

The IAEA spokeswoman demurred that the State Department is the final check, since it grants visas to those on its roster.

Steele says that, to the best of his knowledge, federal authorities haven't scrubbed the roster of 400-plus foreign nationals who have participated in the course over the past 23 years, for matches to terrorist watch lists. Authorities recently audited another Energy training program, started by the Clinton administration, that teaches Yemenites, among other Arabs, security techniques at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque.

Former Energy security officials say they repeatedly expressed their reservations about letting "rogue-state types," as one put it, inspect security systems at U.S. nuclear sites under the IAEA program.

"We objected on a number of occasions to the kinds of things they were training these guys," said a former senior Energy official, who says his warnings fell on deaf ears at Energy's headquarters during the Clinton administration.

He says the course materials overlap with a lot of the security procedures in place at Sandia and other nuclear labs.

"The labs pulled heavily from the procedures in the books that they prepared for the course. So when you went through that course, you pretty well knew what was going on with security at the labs," he said. "I mean, you could see the procedures and overlays."

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He said a supplement to the basic course includes "identifying weaknesses and vulnerabilities" in commercial security systems.

"We raised some issues about training some of these foreign nationals, particularly ones from the Middle East," the official said. "They were teaching them to black out systems, which they could use against us at the labs."

Steele says Washington OKs all materials used by Sandia, which is run by Lockheed-Martin Corp. Its subsidiary, Sandia Corp., runs security at the lab.

"We scrub materials with DOE," he said. "We say, 'This is what we want to teach the international world. Is everything cool?' And they say, yes or no."

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