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# Government Plans Stricter Nuclear Plant Security

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By Chris Baltimore

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. government is expected to soon order the nation's 103 nuclear power plants to improve security against potential attacks like the hijacked planes flown into the World Trade Center, an industry group said on Tuesday.

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will soon notify power plant operators to upgrade security related to employees, training and physical barriers around

plants, said the Nuclear Energy Institute, the industry's main lobbying group.

For security reasons, the regulatory agency is not expected to disclose specific modifications, the trade group said in a statement. The NRC had no comment.

Osama bin Laden ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and his al Qaeda network have been blamed for the Sept. 11 hijacked plane attacks that felled the World Trade Center and punched a hole in the Pentagon ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

U.S. officials are concerned the network could be plotting a second airline attack, this time on a nuclear power plant.

"The required security refinements come in the general areas of personnel, training and additional physical safety barriers," the group said. A spokesman declined to elaborate on the kinds of added security to be ordered by the government.

The announcement got a cautious welcome from Democratic Rep. Edward Markey of Massachusetts, a long-time critic of the nuclear industry on safety grounds.

"I am surprised to hear about potential upgrades to nuclear reactor security from the nuclear industry rather than from the government agency charged with overseeing it," Markey said in a statement.

Nuclear safety and activist groups have urged the Bush administration to adopt stricter measures, such as military guards at nuclear power plants and rigorous employee screening. They say nuclear plants are vulnerable to a Boeing 767 strike at full speed, even with concrete walls over four feet thick.

"Our sense today is that these plants are sitting ducks," said Paul Leventhal, president of watchdog group Nuclear Control Institute.

Last week, Tom Ridge, director of the White House Homeland Security office, said U.S. security agencies were considering "bricks and mortar adjustments" to the nation's 103 nuclear power plants to guard against a possible airline attack.

The NRC placed all U.S. plants on heightened alert immediately after the September attacks and began reviewing its security guidelines.

Current NRC guidelines do not require nuclear plants to prepare for an airplane threat, and instead focus on scenarios involving ground attacks.

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After the Sept. 11 attacks, NRC Chairman Richard Meserve ordered a complete review of security measures.

Leventhal characterized the review as a "topless to bottomless review," saying it is "meaningless and infinite in its scope."

His group is calling for U.S. military special forces troops to guard nuclear plants, along with anti-aircraft batteries on site to shoot down aircraft if other protective attempts fail.

Ralph Beedle, the industry group's chief nuclear officer, said U.S. plants already have tight security.

"The nuclear energy industry continues to do everything we can to improve security preparedness at the nation's nuclear plants," Beedle said.

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