



Daily Briefing

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Expert speaks out against federalizing nuclear security workforce

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A proposed legislative mandate to federalize security workers at the nation's 103 operating nuclear power plants will not make nuclear plants any safer, an expert said at a briefing Monday.

Like airports, the security of nuclear power plants has been closely scrutinized since the attacks of Sept. 11, and some members of Congress have called for strengthening the nation's nuclear security by federalizing its workforce, much as they federalized airport security.

But airport security workers and nuclear security officers couldn't be more different, according to Mark Paul Findlay, a former Secret Service agent and current director of security for the Nuclear Management Co., a nuclear power company that owns and operates six nuclear plants in the Midwest.

At a briefing held by the Nuclear Energy Institute, an association that represents the interests of the nuclear power industry, Findlay noted that most nuclear security employees are professional security officers, with either military or law enforcement backgrounds. Nuclear security officers have a 10 percent yearly turnover rate, and most who leave return to their former law enforcement careers, he said.

"There is nothing in common between an airport screener and a nuclear security officer," he said, adding, "We don't get the rejects from McDonald's."

Low pay and high job turnover rates were major factors in the government's decision to federalize airport security workers. Now, to join the federal airport screening force, an applicant must be a U.S. citizen, fluent in English and hold a high school diploma or equivalency certificate or a year of relevant work experience. In addition, pay scales have been boosted to create more of a career path for federal airport security workers.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., has sponsored a bill--the 2001 Nuclear Security Act, ([S. 1746](#))--that would federalize nuclear security workers. According to a December 2001 report by the Nuclear Energy Institute, there are more than 5,000 nuclear security officers nationwide. The bill would shift these workers to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a move NRC Chairman Richard Meserve opposes. The bill is currently in committee, according to a spokeswoman for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Findlay said the bill would create dual power structures at nuclear plants, which would be inefficient and unwieldy.

The nuclear power industry has been on high alert since Sept. 11 and is waiting for the results of the NRC's top-to-bottom security review. The NRC regulates and evaluates security at nuclear power plants. The companies that own and operate the plants are responsible for providing a security force and are required to meet a set of minimum security standards outlined by the agency.

"Nuclear power plants are safe and secure," Findlay said. "The nuclear power industry had a very robust security program before [Sept. 11] consisting of motivated, dedicated and highly trained paramilitary organizations." Findlay said his security force includes former U.S. special forces operatives and military snipers who train for the eventuality of terror attacks as part of their jobs. Findlay downplayed the risk of terrorists flying a jumbo jet into a nuclear power plant, a threat widely reported in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

"Nuclear power plants are designed to withstand tremendous trauma," said Donald Long, an independent consultant who is the former security manager for the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station in Lacey Township, N.J., and the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth, Mass. "The best way to prevent an air strike on a nuclear power plant is to prevent terrorists from ever gaining control of a large airliner."

Long said the public should be reassured that nuclear plants are built to withstand attacks and that nuclear plant operators are well informed of threats. The CIA, the Defense Department and the FBI provide a steady analysis of potential threats every day to the NRC and nuclear plant operators, he said.

Nuclear plant operators are also mindful of the potential for cyberattacks. While Findlay said plants do not use “land-line” telephone lines, they are connected to the Internet. Plant operators get information about potential cyberattacks from the FBI. They also report all cyberattacks to the FBI.

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