

COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP
NUCLEAR CONTROL INSTITUTE
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For Immediate Release
May 1, 2003

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NUCLEAR TERRORISM EXPERTS CRITICIZE
NRC'S 'MINI-STEPS' ON REACTOR SECURITY

"MINIMAL CHANGES ARE INSUFFICIENT TO PROTECT AGAINST 9/11-TYPE THREATS"

Three experts on protecting reactors from terrorist attacks, writing in the current *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, have taken the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to task for bending to industry pressure and failing to upgrade nuclear plant security consistent with the post-September 11 threat environment.

For a quarter of a century, NRC has required reactor operators to design their security plans to protect only against a land-based terrorist event by no more than three external attackers operating as a single team and using weapons no more sophisticated than hand-carried automatic rifles. On September 11, 2001, however, more than six times that number, operating as four separate teams, using airplanes as weapons, launched a terrorist attack in the United States that took thousands of lives. A successful terrorist attack on a reactor could result in tens of thousands of casualties from prompt deaths and delayed cancers. Yet a year and a half passed without NRC revising its "Design Basis Threat" (DBT) rules.

On Tuesday, NRC finally announced it was changing the threat rules, after intensive consultation with the nuclear industry but with representatives of public interest organizations frozen out. The NRC has previously suggested that, in order not to burden industry, the new rules would not require reactor operators to protect against a threat equal to or greater than encountered on 9/11. Despite the fact that many elements of the old rules are publicly available in the Code of Federal Regulations, NRC is keeping all details of its new order secret.

"The NRC should be asked one simple question: Are reactor security plans now going to be required to protect against at least a September 11-scale attack?" said Daniel Hirsch, President of the Los Angeles-based Committee to Bridge the Gap and co-author of the just-released article. "If the answer is yes, there is no security reason for not saying so and reassuring the public. Only if the answer is no, meaning our reactors will still be vulnerable to a 9/11-level attack, can one understand keeping that fact secret, to avoid the public outrage that would result. But embarrassment to government over its failure to protect the public is no grounds for not leveling with the American people."

David Lochbaum, nuclear safety engineer with the Union of Concerned Scientists and a co-author of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* article, was on travel and unavailable for immediate comment on the NRC's DBT decision.

Dr. Edwin Lyman, President of the Nuclear Control Institute and the third co-author, said, "Nearly half the reactors in the country couldn't pass tests involving mock attacks by three terrorists, even with six months advance notice. I am very concerned that the NRC-industry deal announced Tuesday will leave the nation's reactors insufficiently protected against a terrorist threat of the magnitude we saw on 9/11. The new rule was created in closed-door meetings with the nuclear industry, with representatives of the public shut out. Industry appears to have gotten what it wanted – only a minimal increase in the assumed threat it must protect against. But the public has been placed at great risk by this sweetheart deal with industry."

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The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* article is at
<http://www.thebulletin.org/issues/2003/mj03/mj03hirsch.html>

Further background on security problems at nuclear power plants can be found at
<http://www.nci.org/nuketerror.htm>
http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/nuclear_safety/page.cfm?pageID=176