



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

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Homeland Security:
Surveillance and Monitoring of Explosive Storage Facilities
Monday, August 2, 2004
San Mateo, California

Testimony of Sheriff Don Horsley:

Thank you members of the Subcommittee on National Security for your leadership on this issue and for your willingness to work with law enforcement on developing National Standards for Explosives Storage Facilities.

I would like to begin by giving a brief synopsis of the events that highlighted the need for this hearing.

The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, along with San Francisco Police Department and the FBI have maintained a munitions storage site on the City of San Francisco Watershed property for nearly 20 years. Over the July 4th weekend, the storage facility was burglarized and approximately 200 lbs of explosives were taken. We promptly notified the media and all State and Local agencies of the theft. Thanks to the combined efforts of local law enforcement and the investigative work of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE), the culprits were quickly apprehended and all of the stolen material, including the 10 lbs of C4 explosives belonging to the San Mateo County Bomb Squad, was recovered.

Since the buck stops at the top of an organization, I take full responsibility for the breach in security of our munitions bunker. While the Bomb Squad stored the explosives in an approved and theft resistant munitions storage container and sited the secure container in a remote location, away from buildings and population centers, we mistakenly relied on the remoteness and secrecy of the location and the physical security of the BATFE approved munitions storage sheds for security. It was also thought that the random patrols by watershed rangers who are responsible for keeping out trespassers, but were not specifically responsible for the munitions storage site was additional security for the site. Unfortunately, I was not made aware that the alarm on the storage containers was inoperable.

In hindsight, the Sheriff's Office Administration should have established a regularly scheduled inspection of the site by our Office of Professional Standards. Clearly, fencing of the site, a functioning alarm and remote surveillance by camera could have prevented this incident from occurring.

Some may ask why have these materials at all? All law enforcement agencies that maintain bomb disposal squads need to have both explosive material and a safe and secure storage facility. Explosive materials are used for training purposes. Specifically, we must have explosive materials if we are to train canines to locate explosive devices. Additionally, bomb disposal units are called upon to dismantle explosive devices and store the material for either evidence and/or destruction. Lastly, there are occasions when unstable and explosive materials are recovered by a bomb disposal squad that must be destroyed by the use of explosive materials.

Subsequent to the incident in San Mateo County, I have found that there have been similar losses of explosive materials nationwide. I think that it is timely that this review of National and State regulations and standards takes place.

At the request of this committee, I have been asked to make recommendations regarding Federal and State Guidelines for the storage, monitoring and protection of publicly owned explosives material storage sites.

The current regulations are found in Title 27, Code of Federal Regulations. In summary, BATFE requires that explosive material be stored certain distances from populated buildings and that the munitions storage facility be constructed of quarter inch steel and lined with two inch plywood and that it be theft resistant. Our storage container met these minimum requirements.

The FBI requires that bomb technicians must have successfully completed the Redstone Arsenal training curriculum.

From our review of this event, the Sheriff's Office will be taking the following steps and I would suggest that these local requirements might be a good starting point for future legislative action:

1. We will need to find a secure location at which to store explosives and other volatile substances that meets BATFE guidelines.
2. The location will be fenced.
3. The site will have a working alarm system.
4. Cameras should monitor the location. Bomb squad members will monitor the cameras.

5. Physical checks which include:
 - a. Entry log
 - b. Inventory log update when items are being utilized or stored
 - c. The log will include an employee signature and date
 - d. Inventory entries must be specific regarding item, amount, weight or volume of content
6. A regular rotation of five to six on call bomb techs will check and double check log entries and inventory.
7. The Bomb Squad manager will receive a monthly copy of the storage facility's current contents and inventory.
8. The Bomb Squad manager will make random, periodic inspections of the site to verify the accuracy of the inventory reports and the working conditions of all security devices. These inspections will occur no less than twice yearly and will be reported directly to the Sheriff.
9. BATFE will be requested to inspect the storage site yearly with the results to be reported directly to the Sheriff.

Regarding National Standards, I would also recommend the following:

1. Give BATFE authority to require that all explosive storage sites submit to an annual inspection.
2. Require licensing of all explosive storage sites.
3. Any agency that fails to comply with BATFE safety and security requirements would be decertified to store explosives or operate a Bomb Disposal Squad.
4. Require a specific training course for managers of Bomb Squads to ensure that they have knowledge of professional practices and to ensure compliance with all appropriate protocols.

That concludes my comments. I would like to again thank the committee for your interest in this issue and for your work in helping to develop National Standards for Explosive Storage Facilities.