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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations

Field Hearing

Homeland Security: Surveillance and Monitoring of Explosive Storage Facilities

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San Mateo, CA
August 2, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you regarding this urgent matter. And let me also thank you for agreeing to conduct this hearing locally. When I first contacted Congressman Lantos and Congresswoman Eshoo regarding this matter, I knew that action needed to be taken, but the responsiveness that you all have shown is remarkable and appreciated.

As a former San Francisco Police Inspector, I fully recognize that national security begins with local law enforcement. Homeland Security's foot soldiers can be found patrolling the streets of America's cities and counties as police officers and sheriff's deputies.

While we go to great lengths to ensure that security at our high-profile military and government facilities is not compromised, we cannot ignore potential threats that exist at the local level. It is not enough that the federal government is aware of the danger that these threats pose. They must also take definitive steps to ensure that local governments and our first responders have the direction, training and funding necessary to effectively protect our citizens.

The storage facility here in San Mateo County that was burglarized in July was used by local law enforcement agencies to store high-level explosives. Some of these explosives were confiscated evidence and some served a legitimate purpose and function, and were the original property of the respective agencies. Altogether, the facility held explosives that were powerful enough to blow a hole in the Golden Gate Bridge.

It is important to understand that this is not a situation that is unique to the Bay Area. In fact, last year there were 80 incidents of stolen high-level explosives nationwide. Facilities like ours are

scattered across the landscape of this country, and unfortunately, security protocols at these facilities are just as scattered. While it is true that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has jurisdiction over where and how an agency stores its explosives, there are no uniform standards regulating how those materials are secured from theft.

This is not a simple task. In the interest of the public, ATF mandates that high-level explosives are stored away from populated areas. Unfortunately, remote areas like these are the most difficult to patrol and secure. In these cases, protecting our citizens requires expert planning and a clear, specific directive.

The facility here in San Mateo County contained materials used by three different law enforcement agencies and was protected by gates, locks, regular patrols and alarms that may or may not have been functioning properly. Obviously, immediate steps have been taken within the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department to improve the level of security at new, undisclosed facilities. But fixing the problem here will not prevent this from happening again somewhere else. Many agencies across the country store high-level explosives in facilities that are less secure than the one in Crystal Springs. If this incident can happen here, it can happen anywhere.

As long as all other law enforcement agencies, in other counties, and in other states, are each individually responsible for securing these dangerous materials we will not be able to guarantee that they are adequately protected. As long as there are no standards to meet or oversight to ensure accountability to those standards, we cannot claim to be doing our best to protect our citizens.

You have come to San Mateo County today because you recognize that the system that currently exists is flawed and needs to be changed. It is my recommendation that you take the necessary steps to enact uniform, nationwide minimum security standards where high-level explosives are stored and that those standards: their implementation, enforcement and oversight be monitored and fully funded by the federal government.

Again, I want to thank Congressman Lantos for hearing our call to bring attention to this issue and Congresswoman Eshoo for being a consistent voice of concern for where and how our homeland security funds are spent.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.