Testimony of Jack Sawicki, September 29, 2003
Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

Good afternoon, my name is Jack Sawicki, and it is an honor to be invited to testify before you today on our experience with the Technical Support Working Group, or "TSWG." I am Director of Business Development for the GEOMET Technologies Division of Versar Corporation, a Small Business headquartered in Springfield, Virginia. We have been in the business of response, testing, research, and development with chemical and biological agents and other hazardous materials for almost 30 years. I have been with GEOMET for 13 years and am responsible for our proposal efforts, as well as research and development. I live in Arlington, Virginia, where I am a member of the Cherrydale Volunteer Fire Department and the Arlington, Pentagon, and Alexandria Local Emergency Planning Committee. I also represented Arlington from 1991 until September 2001 on the Department of Defense/Department of Justice Interagency Board, or IAB. Prior to becoming involved with research and development, I was a First Responder in Alexandria, Virginia, and before that, with the Federal Government.

GEOMET was awarded our first TSWG contract in 1998 to develop personal protective ensembles for First Responders and medical personnel. DTAPS—Disposable Toxic Agent Protective Ensembles—are designed to provide protection from chemical, biological, and radiological materials, of terrorist and industrial origin. A specific requirement was the proper integration of protective suits with boots, gloves, and respirators, without the use of unreliable field expedient measures such as duct tape. Four systems were developed, two for firefighters and hazmat teams that typically use SCBAs—or self contained breathing apparatus, one for EMS--Emergency Medical Services personnel, and one for hospital emergency personnel. The EMS and Hospital Ensembles are shown in Figures 1 and 2, and we also have samples here today.

These items are currently offered for sale by our firm, with several subcontractors, including the DuPont company and Global Secure, Onguard and North Safety companies. One barrier we have encountered in the marketplace, is that users are still accepting cheaper "duct tape fixes" in purchasing equipment with Federal Funds, even though they do not meet applicable safety standards, such as those from the National Fire Protective Association, that have been endorsed by the IAB. In fact, at a recent meeting, which I attended as an observer, the IAB asked the Government to require that future purchases of such equipment meet these important Standards. We encourage the Congress to do the same.

Another contract that GEOMET was awarded via TSWG in 2000 was the Rapid Contaminated Carcass and Plant Disposal System. This system was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The charge was to design portable systems, that could be distributed to each state, and could be rapidly trucked to outbreak sites around the U.S. The incinerators must safely burn plant or animal materials that were contaminated with biological agents, such as anthrax, hoof and mouth and chronic wasting disease, citrus canker, etc. Currently, the state of the art for disposal of such material is open burning,

or burial, neither of which are completely effective. One requirement was that the system had to automatically accept such difficult items as entire long-horn steers, tree trunks, truckloads of chickens, etc., at a rate of 120,000 pounds per day. To do this, a grinder with an 80,000 pound blade was developed. The Design Phase of the device was successfully completed in 2002, although the project was cancelled due to lack of funding before a prototype was built and tested. This system design is illustrated in Figure 3.

In 2002 we were awarded another TSWG contract to develop a Heat Stress Calculator. Our firm has personal experience in this due to our history of performing environmental remediation. Two recent examples are the disinfection of GSA building 401 which processes mail for the Executive Branch, and the Former Soviet Union biological weapons dumpsite in Uzbekistan. Our Heat Stress Calculator will allow workers to determine how long they can safely operate in personal protective equipment.

Our experience in the TSWG process has generally been good. There are three sequential submittals in obtaining these contracts. First, a one-page "Quad Chart" is submitted, which is shown to potential Government funders. If accepted, a 12 page "White Paper" is submitted. The last step is submittal of a Full Proposal. We have submitted several dozen Quad Charts, around a half dozen White Papers, and have had three awards, which is considered a good track record.

We have one suggestion for improving this process. The one-page Quad Chart format does not allow sufficient space to provide enough information for evaluation. We suggest that firms be allowed to provide a two-page Mini-White Paper at the same time. If reviewers see a Quad Chart that interests them, but have questions about the proposal, the two-page White Paper could be consulted for additional information. We believe that some valuable TSWG proposals may not been funded as reviewers were not able to fully understand the concept based on the limited information that can be presented in the Quad Chart format. Submittal of a two page Mini-White Paper would not present an undue burden on either companies or the Government.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today and am happy to answer any questions.