

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## **Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays**

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Let me first thank Congressman Tim Murphy for inviting the Subcommittee here today. He is a thoughtful, active participant in our oversight, and we are happy to have the opportunity to examine the important issue of chemical plant security from this perspective.

According to a February bulletin from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Infrastructure Protection Center, industrial chemical plants remain “viable targets” for attacks by Al Qa’ida terrorists. So we meet this morning to ask if the public and private sectors are pursuing an equally viable strategy to repel or respond to those attacks.

Many in this area may not think so, and for good reason. Through last year, a series of media reports pointed to chronically lax security and obviously avoidable vulnerabilities at chemical facilities here and across the nation. A porous perimeter of fallen fences and poorly aimed security cameras that failed to stop intruders armed only with pens and cameras is not likely to deter trained terrorists seeking access to deadly chemicals.

More than 15,000 U.S. facilities use large amounts of extremely hazardous substances. Three thousand of those sites project worst-case hazard zones in which released chemicals could reach more than ten thousand people nearby or far downwind. Vulnerability zones around one hundred and twenty-five chemical facilities could each encompass more than one million people.

Securing this widely dispersed network of chemical production, storage and distribution facilities poses difficult challenges and demands tough choices. Given the undeniable attractiveness of toxic and flammable compounds terrorists could use as pre-positioned weapons of mass destruction, the need for increased physical security is obvious. But gates, guns and guards are not the only answers. Chemical infrastructure could remain economically critical, but less vulnerable, if inherently safer substances and processes were adopted to reduce their toxic utility to terrorists. Increased security and reduced chemical risk need not be mutually exclusive. But so far, sustained progress on either seems much too elusive.

Another challenge posed by increased chemical facility security pits the need for public information and awareness against the effort to keep facility plans and strategies out the hands of terrorists. Documents on emergency response plans and chemical plant preparedness have been removed from the Internet and other public sources. The question remains whether that loss of transparency enhances security more than it shields poor planning from needed public scrutiny.

As in other areas of terrorism preparedness, the chemical industry and those who regulate it are hard pressed to answer the question, "Prepared for what?" Without threat-based standards against which to measure security spending, money and time are being wasted lurching from crisis to crisis, as each Code Orange alert and sensational media incursion highlights new vulnerabilities.

The Department of Homeland Security is conducting an inventory of America's critical infrastructure and formulating preparedness standards to secure key industrial targets from terrorists. The Assistant Secretary of DHS for Infrastructure Protection, Mr. Robert Liscouski, will testify on the status of those efforts. We appreciate his being here.

State and local officials, industry association representatives and an expert from the U.S. General Accounting Office will also testify. We appreciate the time, dedication and expertise of all our witnesses and we look forward to their testimony.