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

August 2, 2004

Let me first thank Congressman Tom Lantos for inviting the Subcommittee here today. In 1987, when I first arrived in Congress, Chairman Lantos taught me a great deal about leadership and determination. Tom one of the most articulate, passionate and persuasive Members of the House of Representatives. He is known on both sides of the aisle for his principled and courageous approach to international and domestic issues. He is a thoughtful, energetic participant in our oversight, and we are grateful for the opportunity to examine the adequacy of security safeguards at explosive material storage facilities from his perspective.

During the weekend of July 4, 2004, almost two hundred pounds of explosive material were stolen from the San Mateo County, Crystal Springs Reservoir storage facility. Military binary explosives, plastic C4, detonation cords and blasting caps were reported taken from the magazine used to store explosives for training drills and confiscated weapons and ammunition. Fortunately, the robbery does not appear terror-related, and suspects were apprehended within days of the crime. Law enforcement authorities believe they have recovered all the explosives.

This apparently local event should serve as a national wake-up call. Many think storage facilities operated by state and local agencies may be more vulnerable to theft, sabotage or terrorist attack than those operated by

businesses. Securing explosives storage facilities poses difficult challenges and demands tough choices. The need for increased physical security against heightened threats is obvious. While it is not possible to eliminate the vulnerability of all attractive terrorist targets throughout the country, strategic improvements in security can make it more difficult to acquire explosive material and can lessen the impact of attacks that do occur.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is responsible for enforcement of federal laws related to storage of explosives in private facilities, but states have primary authority to enforce protection standards at public sites. It is estimated there are hundreds of these bunkers throughout the United States. Adherence to federal security standards by public storage facilities is voluntary. As a result, it is unclear whether local law enforcement agencies meet minimal ATF guidelines, or whether varying state and local security requirements provide adequate protection.

Given the undeniable allure of explosives to terrorists, the Subcommittee asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to undertake a study to examine the vulnerability of public and private explosive storage facilities and recommend actions needed to correct facility security deficiencies. Such a risk management approach is essential to realign enhanced security measures with new, more dynamic threats.

So we meet this morning to ask if the public and private sectors are pursuing a viable security strategy to protect the nation's explosives storage facilities. Federal witnesses will be questioned about the adequacy of laws and existing enforcement programs to assure the security of high explosives stored by local law enforcement agencies. State and local witnesses will testify about storage regulations and the need for uniform security standards. Witnesses from business and industry will describe best practices for the storage of high explosives and industry recommendations for security improvements.

We appreciate the time, dedication and expertise of all our witnesses and we look forward to their testimony.