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Statements of

Barney T. Villa
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before the

House Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

concerning

Homeland Security: Surveillance and Monitoring of Explosive Storage Facilities

August 2, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good Morning, I am Barney T. Villa, International Director of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, commonly referred to as the IABTI.

I am also a full time Deputy Sheriff for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, assigned to the Arson Explosives Detail. With me today is Greg Smith, Region 1

Director of the IABTI, Greg is also a full time employee with the California Department of Forestry, Arson Bomb Unit.

The IABTI was formed after the first National Explosive Ordnance Disposal Conference, held in March of 1973, in Sacramento, California. It was decided then, that a professional association was required to address the needs of this unique group. This led to the establishment of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators. A formal Charter was developed with a total of sixty-four members. We

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are now 5,000 members, in sixty countries around the world.

The IABTI is an international, independent, nonprofit, professional association committed to countering and defeating the growing menace that bombs and weapons of mass destruction present worldwide. The IABTI is the world leader in the dissemination of information and training on destructive devices to the national and international public safety community. This is sought through the exchange of training, expertise and information among personnel employed in the fields of law enforcement, fire and emergency services, the military, forensic science and other related fields.

While the legitimate uses of explosives in areas such as construction, mining and land clearance has made our modern lives easier; tragically, explosives have also been diverted to criminal activities, including murder, intimidation, extortion and malicious destruction of property.

Explosives have always been a critical tool for Bomb Disposal Technicians, Bombing Investigators and in other related fields. They are used in the render safe and disposal of improvised explosive devices and components, technician training and scientific testing.

The IABTI strongly advocates that all of its members who maintain explosive storage facilities, ensure that they are in compliance with local, state and federal guidelines related to explosive magazines. State and local authorities are subject to federal explosive law relative to storage, but as they are not licensees or permit holders, they do not have oversight by the ATF. Entities can

request an ATF review of their storage facility to verify their compliance. Additionally, technicians can receive training on the proper use, handling and storage of explosives through the IABTI.

The IABTI further advocates that their members exercise best practices and measure up to an equivalent of ATF standards and regulations, or some other professional set of guidelines. We recommend that additional security enhancements, such as security lighting, fencing, alarms and cameras are installed at their respective explosive storage facilities whenever practicable.

The IABTI understands and respects the budgetary problems faced by Bomb Squad Commanders who seek funding for such items for the safety and security of their explosive storage facilities. We understand from our membership that this funding is sometimes only approved after substantial delays, or after a theft occurs. This is often due to conflicting priorities in the allocation of the funding that is available to most agencies.

The IABTI believes that the aforementioned enhancements to the current standards are critical to ensuring the secure storage of explosives. The budget constraints experienced by most agencies prohibit the implementation of many of the recommended security enhancements. We believe that the security of explosive storage facilities might prove to be a proper allocation for Homeland Defense funds. Further, we respectfully request that the Committee review the allocation of these funds to determine if any might be made available for this important project.

We encourage all of our members to provide best practice standards and advisory functions in

the preparation of relevant safety and security legislation. Many of our members in the United States solicit the ATF to inspect their explosive storage facilities on a more frequent basis than that which is mandated by current regulations. Federal Law Relating to Explosives taken from 18 U.S.C. Chapter 40, subpart K- Storage, section 55.204, states any person storing explosive materials shall inspect his magazine at least every seven days. We encourage our membership to surpass this mandate and perform inspections on a daily basis whenever possible.

We know from ATF statistics, that break-ins occur in many different ways. Locks cut and pried, doors pried or blown open, keys used, wall entry, roof entry, window and/or vent entry, floor entry and even the inside helper from the respective company who owns and maintains the explosive storage facility. The IABTI encourages its membership to adhere to all of the federal laws and regulations as a best practice policy to prevent such activities from happening.

The possession of explosives by civilian bomb technicians is paramount in order for them to perform their daily duties. In addition to the functions while doing render safe procedures, we are also mandated to perform a minimum amount of training with both high and low explosives each year to keep our certification current as working bomb technicians. Major Bomb Squads across the United States maintain and operate their own explosive storage facilities. They strictly adhere to current federal regulations by working very closely with each other in their efforts to prevent such thefts.

On behalf of the men and women of the IABTI, we thank you for your time today. We remain committed to bringing the very best to our membership with new ideas that may come forth from

these meetings. The use of explosives remains the preferred weapon of terrorists and the use of explosives by bomb disposal technicians will continue to be a valuable tool in their fight in the war on terrorism. We praise the efforts of the Subcommittee to address the sensitive and important issues surrounding the storage of explosive materials.

This concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions.