

## Committee Leaders Continue Questioning DNDO's Ability to Certify New Radiation Detection Monitors

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### Committee Leaders Continue Questioning DNDO's Ability to Certify New Radiation Detection Monitors

Washington, DC - Leaders of the Committee on Energy and Commerce today released a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Phase 3 test report on advanced spectroscopic portal (ASP) monitors. GAO found that the test report does not accurately depict the results of the test and could be misleading.

DHS, through its Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO), is responsible for conducting the research, development, testing and evaluation of equipment that can be used to detect smuggled nuclear or radiological materials. Radiation detection portal monitors are part of the U.S. defense against the threat of nuclear smuggling.

Last year, Congress required that funds for new ASP monitors could not be spent until the Secretary of DHS certified that these machines represented a significant increase in operational effectiveness over currently deployed portal monitors. The Phase 3 test, among others, was conducted by DHS to identify areas in which improvement is needed.

"I'm concerned that the testing for the new detectors remains flawed," said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee. "We still don't know if this extremely expensive technology works any better than the current equipment. Until there is objective and concrete evidence that the new machines have clear benefits over the existing detectors, I cannot support additional procurements. I will also be asking the Secretary of DHS to likewise refrain from such reckless action until then. In this time of increasingly tight budgets, the taxpayer deserves nothing less."

### "Preventing terrorists

from smuggling nuclear material into the country is both a top priority and a very big job," said Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), Ranking Member of the Committee. "We certainly can't continue to rely on hand-held radiation detectors that have such a well-documented history of problems. At the same time, the GAO and the Department of Homeland Security seem to be in strong disagreement about whether or how certain test results can be used as part of a certification decision of new radiation detection monitors, but I think the committee can help resolve these issues and assure that the best decision is made."

### "We

understand DNDO has run additional tests this summer, but until GAO has had a chance to thoroughly evaluate the full methodology used, the Secretary should not certify the new detectors for purchase," said Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "We all want the nation to be protected as comprehensively as possible, and that means ensuring that prior to certification we know the full capabilities and limitations of what the machines can detect."

### "We must improve

our scanning technology at the border to stop terrorists from smuggling radiological material into America for a possible attack," said Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "Unfortunately, the GAO and the Department of Homeland Security continue to have strong disagreements about data that could be used in an important certification decision for advanced portal monitors. Given the importance of this national security issue, the Committee may need to step in to help resolve these issues."

### As

part of the Committee's five year investigation into how best to prevent nuclear smuggling and enhance detection capabilities at U.S. border crossings and seaports, the lawmakers asked GAO to assess the degree to which the Phase 3 test report accurately depicts the test results and the appropriateness of using the test results to determine whether ASPs represent a significant improvement over the radiation detection equipment currently being used.

### GAO

found that the test results could be misleading because the limitations of the test are not explained in the report. The results provide little information about the actual performance capabilities of the ASPs due to the limited number of test runs performed. According to GAO, the Phase 3 report often presents each test result as a single value when it would have been more appropriately stated as a range of potential values.

### For example, GAO said the report

states that an ASP could identify a source material 50 percent of the time during a test. However, the narrative does not disclose DNDO can only estimate that the ASP would correctly identify the source from about 15 percent to about 85 percent of the time because of the limited number of test runs. GAO said that this result lacks the precision implied by DNDO's narrative and DNDO's reporting of the test results in this manner makes them appear more conclusive and precise than they really are.

"It is not appropriate to use the Phase 3 test report in determining whether the ASPs represent a significant improvement over currently deployed radiation equipment because the limited number of test runs do not support many of the comparisons of ASP performance made in the Phase 3 report," GAO concluded in its report released today.

GAO recommends that the DHS Secretary revise the Phase 3 report to better disclose test results and limitations if the report is going to be used in any certification decision for ASP acquisition.

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Read the report