

GAO Calls for Added Port Security with Projected Growth in Liquefied Natural Gas Imports

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Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Washington, DC - A lack of resources has hampered U.S. Coast Guard efforts to secure ports handling energy commodities such as gasoline and liquefied natural gas (LNG), according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released today. The report, requested last year by Reps. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Joe Barton (R-TX), Ranking Member of the Committee, and Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a member of the Committee, highlights a greater need for resources to protect the growing number of liquefied natural gas tankers coming into U.S. ports from overseas. LNG tankers now transport 3 percent of U.S. natural gas supplies, but LNG imports are projected to grow by nearly 400 percent to 17 percent of U.S. natural gas consumption by the year 2015.

GAO's report, *Maritime Security: Federal Efforts Needed to Address Challenges in Preventing and Responding to Terrorist Attacks on Energy Commodity Tankers*, highlights the fact that energy commodity tankers have been targets of recent maritime terrorist attacks, such as the suicide attack on the oil tanker *Limberg* off the coast of Yemen in 2002 and multiple attacks from explosive-packed vessels against oil terminals in Iraq in 2004.

According to the report, tankers are also vulnerable to stand-off attacks using rockets, mortar or rocket propelled grenades; armed assaults; and insider attacks executed through a crew conspiracy. GAO stated, "The threat of seaborne terrorist attacks on maritime energy tankers and infrastructure is likely to persist," with the greatest risks at overseas shipping chokepoints such as the Straits of Hormuz, the Straits of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and the Panama Canal.

Although GAO reported no specific threat of attack at U.S. ports, intelligence indicates that domestic ports are targets under consideration by terrorists. Captured terrorist training manuals cite seaports as targets and instruct trainees to use covert means to obtain surveillance information in attack planning. An attack could have significant public safety implications. For example, a terrorist attack on an LNG tanker could create a fire with such intensity that individuals could be burned as far as one and a quarter miles away after only 30 seconds of exposure, according to a companion GAO report issued in February 2007 (http://energycommerce.house.gov/Press_110/GAOfeb2007.pdf).

The Coast Guard's activities range from patrolling waters, boarding ships and escorting dangerous cargoes, to overseeing security actions taken by vessel and facility operators. The Administration requested \$45 million for Fiscal Year '08 for the Coast Guard's port security efforts. The Homeland Security Appropriations Act enacted by Congress as part of the FY '08 Omnibus Appropriations Act included \$58.8 million to bolster the Coast Guard's efforts.

"If there was an attack on an energy tanker or terminal in a U.S. port, there could be significant economic, environmental and public safety consequences, which would result in even higher gasoline and heating oil prices," said Dingell. "I supported increases to the Coast Guard budget in fiscal year 08 and I plan to carefully review the President's 09 budget request to determine whether the Administration has provided the resources necessary to protect the energy tankers and ports, as identified in this report. GAO's analysis reminds us of the urgent need to reduce energy imports and spur the growth of renewable and non-polluting energy supplies."

Markey, whose district includes the nation's only urban LNG importation terminal, the *Distrigas* facility in Everett, said, "We know that terrorists are looking for the weakest link in our security efforts, and this GAO report is a timely reminder that LNG and oil tankers are serious targets. Given the fact that LNG is being transported into Boston harbor every several days on the way to the Everett LNG terminal, an attack on one of these tankers could be devastating. I will be working with my colleagues to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security responds to the vulnerabilities exposed in this report and that their efforts are not hampered by a lack of resources. We cannot skimp when it comes to public safety."

The GAO report also notes a shortage of money for local first responders and the fact that distribution of grants is hampered by lack of performance measures. The GAO report being released today was finalized in March 2007, but could not be made public due to security sensitive information about U.S. ports and operation. The version released today follows an extensive interagency review to remove security sensitive information.

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