

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

August 1, 2013

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Since 2002, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has conducted audits and assessments of technologies and technical systems that provide objective information on the risks, challenges, and potential of promising systems designed to prevent catastrophic terrorist attacks. This body of work includes radiation and explosives detection technologies, cargo security technologies, and portions of GAO's Technology Assessment portfolio, among others.

Since Fiscal Year 2001, Congress and the Administration have supported a dramatic expansion of the scale and diversity of basic and applied research and development by civilian and military agencies, government-funded laboratories, academia, and private industries on all aspects of the biological threat. Thus, we believe that the Congress and the Administration would benefit from a comprehensive technical evaluation by the GAO of currently deployed systems designed to detect airborne, biological threats in the environment, and those planned or under development, by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

For example, the Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing on June 18, 2013 examining the BioWatch system, a bioaerosol monitoring technology deployed in highly populated urban areas and facilities, designed to detect biological aerosols resulting from intentional or naturally occurring environmental releases. DHS is currently evaluating a new generation of this technology, referred to as "BioWatch Generation-3" (Gen-3 BioWatch), which is intended to perform autonomous detection with improved timeliness, time-resolution, and cost effectiveness over the current manual system (Gen-1/2 BioWatch), and has completed an initial phase of testing.

Since the DHS Office of Health Affairs is in the process of determining whether Gen-3 BioWatch should be funded for a second phase of more advanced testing, and since such testing

assumes a high degree of maturity of the technology, concerns have been raised regarding the extent to which its performance characteristics actually meet operational requirements. Therefore, we are asking GAO to address the following questions:

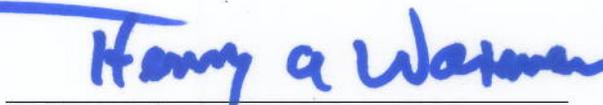
1. To what extent has DHS determined the existing Gen-1/2 Biowatch system's technical capability to detect a biological attack?
2. To what extent do the Gen-3 Biowatch system's technical capabilities meet DHS's requirements and operational needs for phase 2 testing (i.e., what engineering and/or system metrics are being used to determine overall system performance) and what, if any, developmental testing is ongoing or planned for the Gen-3 system?
3. To what extent will the Gen-3 system provide additional benefits to the user over the existing Gen-1/2 system?

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Alan Slobodin of the Majority Committee staff at (202) 225-2927 and Kiren Gopal of the Democratic Committee staff at 226-3400.

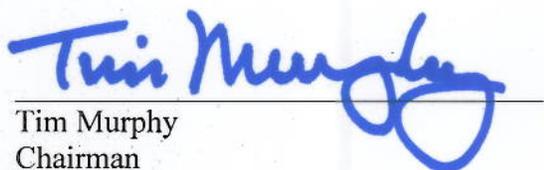
Sincerely,



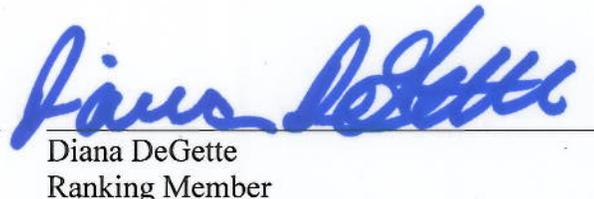
Fred Upton
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Tim Murphy
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
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