HEALTH PHYSICS SOCIETY

Specialists in Radiation Safety

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY OF RADIATION SPECIALISTS SUPPORTS RADIOACTIVE SOURCE LEGISLATION

Radiological dispersion devices (RDDs - informally known as "dirty bombs") are conventional explosive devices incorporating radioactive materials. They are designed to produce radioactive contamination and to instill panic in the population, relying on fear of radiation to induce irrational and dangerous reactions in the general public. These devices may also release enough radioactive contamination that relatively large areas may be unavailable for use by the general public until they can be decontaminated. A logical source of radioactive materials for such devices is orphan sources - radioactive sources that have been lost, stolen, or abandoned by their owners.

Members of the Health Physics Society, a non profit professional organization of specialists in radiation safety, have been working on this matter for some time (see the Health Physics Society's Position Paper and Background Document on Orphan Sources on their Web site at http://www.hps.org/hpspublications/papers.html). Our concern has previously centered on the possibility that such sources may cause inadvertent injury through ignorance or mishandling, as happened in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, Brazil, Thailand, Spain, and other locations. To these concerns has been added the worry that orphan sources can be used to construct dirty bombs. This week, there have been two important announcements that hold promise to reduce the risk that orphan radioactive sources may be used in terrorist attacks, one from the Congress and one from the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

A bill written by Senator Hillary Clinton calls for the formation of a task force to characterize various radioactive sources by the risk they pose and to take steps to safeguard those sources that pose the greatest potential risk of misuse. *The Health Physics Society feels that there must be extensive informed discussion on this issue, and we urge that the proposed classification scheme be developed with the assistance of qualified radiation safety personnel.* We recognize that it is important to assure the security of those sources that pose the greatest threat, but that applying such stringent precautions to minor sources can place an undue burden on the businesses, hospitals, and research institutions that will ultimately be called upon to implement the final requirements of this legislation. We are also in favor of the bill's proposal to create safe and economical storage for sealed sources that are no longer in active use; this measure will help to assure the security of such sources and will reduce the chance that they may end up in the wrong hands.

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The Health Physics Society's understanding of the provisions of Senator Clinton's bill appears to be consistent with its work to date. The Health Physics Society is ready and willing to assist the Congress in its efforts to develop and implement a bill with provisions like those being introduced by Senator Clinton. We look forward to a timely passage of such a bill and its rapid implementation.

Additionally, the initiative announced by the IAEA is another valuable tool in the efforts to keep international orphan sources out of the hands of those who would harm us. The IAEA program, by helping to find and secure orphan sources, is another important step towards ensuring that these are not used in a harmful manner. *The IAEA has long recognized the need to secure such sources to ensure public health and safety; its recent announcement stresses the added urgency of taking these measures.* The Health Physics Society fully supports the IAEA's measures to locate, take possession of, and secure orphan radioactive sources, and we stand ready to assist the IAEA in its efforts.