

Problems Continue with New Technology to Detect Smuggled Radiation, Reports Find

(Washington, DC) – Today, the **House Committee on Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight** held a [hearing](#) to examine ongoing problems with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to acquire its next generation radiation monitors known as Advanced Spectroscopic Portals (ASPs). Both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) released new reports on the ASP program this week that highlighted troubling problems with this program, the adequacy of the current testing plans, the minimal performance gains in the ASPs compared to the existing radiation monitoring system and the high costs of the program, estimated to be \$2 billion.

"Congress expects that the funding federal agencies receive will be well spent," said **Subcommittee Chairman Brad Miller (D-NC)**. "Unfortunately, despite some recent progress, the ASP program has suffered because it lacked all the preparatory steps of a well-managed program."

The ASPs are intended to be an improvement over the current technology by being able to both detect the presence of radiation and identify radioactive material, including distinguishing between radioactive sources that might be used to construct a nuclear bomb, such as Highly Enriched Uranium, and non-threatening naturally-occurring radiological materials, such as that found in ceramic tiles, bananas, or kitty litter. The current technology, polyvinyl toluene (PVT) portal monitors, detect the presence of radiation, but then require a second screening with a handheld Radioactive Isotope Identification Device (RIID) to help identify the source of radiation. The ASPs could potentially improve the flow of commerce by reducing the number of secondary inspections and to more accurately identify radioactive or nuclear material.

However, the program has been under scrutiny since 2006 for failing to have clear-cut program requirements, an adequate test plan, sufficient timelines and development milestones or a transparent and comprehensive cost benefit analysis. Since the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO), a DHS component, was created in 2005, they have been responsible for researching, developing, testing and managing the program.

The hearing examined a GAO report, *Combating Nuclear Smuggling: DHS Improved Testing of Advanced Radiation Detection Portal monitors, but Preliminary Results Show Limits of the New Technology*, and an NAS report, *Evaluating Testing, Costs, and Benefits of Advanced Spectroscopic Portals for Screening Cargo at Ports of Entry*.

"GAO's reports have provided a regular accounting of how the ASP program was going wrong; the Academy's report provides a road-map to how the program could be put back on track—assuming that the Department determines that it is worth the cost and effort," said **Miller**. "Before we move forward with a 2 to 3 billion dollar program we must decide if we will get our money's worth from the new technology, or if it would be better-spent elsewhere."

For more information, please visit the Committee's [website](#).

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