

NNSA and partners launch project to reduce use of radioactive source-based devices in New York City

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NEW YORK – The U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) has partnered with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) to launch the first citywide initiative to reduce the reliance on risk significant devices in medical and research applications. This combined effort will serve as a way to reduce the risk of a terrorist acquiring this material for a radiological dispersal device ("dirty bombs").

NNSA's Acting Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation David Huizenga; DOHMH Commissioner Dr. Mary Travis Bassett; and former Senator Sam Nunn, NTI co-chairman announced the initiative to transition from blood and research irradiators using high-activity sources to alternative technologies that do not use radiological materials.

"We applaud New York City's effort to work together to phase out high activity radioactive sources," Huizenga said. "It has been at the forefront of U.S. efforts to enhance radiological security and serves as an example for other major cities. We are proud to support the city's permanent threat reduction effort and we greatly appreciate its leadership in the prevention of radiological terrorism."

Radioactive sources are used in a number of peaceful medical and research applications such as preparing blood donations for transfusion and cancer research. Through this initiative, New York City medical and academic research institutions will replace most source based irradiators with comparable X-ray alternatives.

NNSA's Office of Radiological Security (ORS) serves a pivotal role in this effort through its Cesium Irradiator Replacement Project. Qualified sites receive financial assistance through the project toward the purchase of new, non-radioisotopic alternatives, as well as the removal and disposal of the source based irradiators.

The initiative builds on an eight-year partnership between the DOHMH, the New York City Police Department, and users of other types of radioactive sources. The partners' shared goal is to increase the physical security of these sources and ensure that law enforcement is prepared to respond to any attempted theft or malicious use of the material.

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