Secrecy News

Recovering Radioactive Nuclear Sources

Posted on Dec.21, 2017 in Dept of Energy (https://fas.org/category/dept-of-energy/), dirty bomb (https://fas.org/category/dirty-bomb-2/) by Steven Aftergood (https://fas.org/author/steven-aftergood/)

Over the past decade the Department of Energy/NNSA has recovered thousands of sealed radioactive isotope sources from around the world that were abandoned, unwanted or no longer needed.

Sealed nuclear sources are utilized for a variety of industrial, medical or military purposes. But at the end of their useful life they can still pose a safety or security hazard.

So the mission of the DOE/NNSA Off-Site Source Recovery Program (https://fas.org/sgp/library/recovery.pdf) is to take possession of "orphan" sources in the interest of public safety and security.

The Program says it has taken control of nearly 40,000 disused and unwanted nuclear sources — about 1.25 million Curies of radioactive material — from 1,400 sites in the US and 25 other countries.

The achievements of the Program were summarized last week in *Strengthening Cradle-to-Grave Control of Radioactive Sources* (https://fas.org/sgp/library/recovery.pdf) by Bill Stewart, Los Alamos National Laboratory, December 11, 2017.

The systematic recovery and control of nuclear materials became an explicit priority during the Obama Administration.

"We are leading a global effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials from terrorists," the Administration's 2010 *National Security Strategy* (https://fas.org/man/eprint/nss2010.pdf) stated. "We are dramatically accelerating and intensifying efforts to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials. . . . We will seek to complete a focused international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world through enhanced protection and accounting practices, expanded cooperation with and through international institutions, and new partnerships to lock down these sensitive materials."

The 2015 Obama *National Security Strategy* (https://fas.org/man/eprint/nss-2015.pdf) likewise affirmed that "Keeping nuclear materials from terrorists . . . remains a high priority."

The 2017 *National Security Strategy* (https://fas.org/man/eprint/nss-2017.pdf) that was published by the White House this week also addressed control of nuclear materials, though in a comparatively terse and generic manner:

"Building on decades of initiatives, we will augment measures to secure, eliminate, and prevent the spread of

WMD and related materials, their delivery systems, technologies, and knowledge to reduce the chance that they might fall into the hands of hostile actors. We will hold state and non-state actors accountable for the use of WMD."

The new *National Security Strategy* (https://fas.org/man/eprint/nss-2017.pdf) included one reference to national security classification, citing it as a potential obstacle to information sharing:

"The U.S. Government will work with our critical infrastructure partners to assess their informational needs and to reduce the barriers to information sharing, such as speed and classification levels."

← The Speech or Debate Clause, and More from CRS (https://fas.org/blogs/secrecy/2017/12/speech-debate-crs/)

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name *

Email *

Website

Post Comment

Author Info

Steven Aftergood

View full bio (http://fas.org/expert/steven-aftergood/)