

House Committee on Science and Technology
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

Hearing on
The Science of Security:
Lessons Learned in Developing, Testing and Operating
Advanced Radiation Monitors

June 25, 2009

Opening Statement of the Honorable Paul Broun, M.D. (R-GA)
Ranking Member

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the witnesses here today, and thank them for participating in this important hearing on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Advanced Spectroscopic Portal (ASP) program.

Yesterday the House took up consideration of the DHS Appropriation bill, and later today the Science Committee's Technology and Innovation subcommittee, which I also sit on, will hold a hearing on cybersecurity. I also sit on the Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, Science and Technology, as well. Needless to say, DHS has kept me busy this week.

This morning we will look into the status of the Department's ongoing development of next-generation Radiation Portal Monitors, get an update from General Accountability Office (GAO) on their continuing work, and receive a report from the National Research Council. It goes without saying that this program has been followed closely for some time now, and thankfully many of the testing issues that GAO brought up in previous reports seem to be mitigated. However, this program is far from "out of the woods." In their most recent analysis, GAO and the NRC raise new issues relating to the rigor of the testing and certification process, and offer paths forward for a potential acquisition in the future. I hope DHS takes these recommendations seriously, and I look forward to ensuring that they are not summarily dismissed for the sake of arbitrary timetables.

Looking forward, DHS should conduct a rigorous Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) that takes into account updated threat assessments, a review of all variations of Concepts of Operations (CONOPS), potential upgrades for existing technologies, and independent cost estimates. It also needs to weigh the pros and cons of not just ASP versus Polyvinyl Toluene (PVT) and Radioisotope Identification Devices (RIID), but also whether the additional capability gained outweighs the needs of other aspects of the Global Nuclear Detection Architecture. Unfortunately, this may be hard to do at this point considering GAO indicated earlier this year that the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) had "not developed an overarching strategic plan to guide its development of a more comprehensive global strategy for nuclear detection."

All of these factors need to be taken into consideration as DHS moves toward an acquisition. Even then, I will remain cautious given the Department's track record with past acquisitions. Many of the issues we are dealing with today could have been prevented by engaging the end-users early in the process, clearly defining requirements, and simply following existing Department acquisition processes.

Last week this subcommittee held a hearing on issues plaguing the National Polar-Orbiting Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS). The ASP program exhibits eerie similarities to that program in that it attempted to link research and development activities with the acquisition of an operational system, and had unclear architectural priorities. Let's hope other federal programs can learn from these lessons and protect taxpayers from future inefficiencies and waste.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Thank you.

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