

# TomPaine.common sense

A Public Interest Journal

# Easy Targets



## *The Chronic Insecurity of the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex*

**The nation's nuclear weapons complex is vulnerable to terrorist attack.**

Security failures at ten sites where nuclear materials are stored and used are “**systemic, constant and recurring,**” according to an investigation by the Project on Government Oversight ([www.POGO.org](http://www.POGO.org)).

The Department of Energy (DOE) hires private security firms to guard these sites. It tests site security with mock attacks, often using U.S. military forces as attackers. Unclassified evidence provided to POGO by insiders shows that **in more than half the tests** security forces fail to protect the facilities (the exact failure rate is classified).

In a test at the Rocky Flats facility in Denver, Navy SEAL “terrorists” successfully “stole” enough nuclear material to make several weapons. At DOE’s Los Alamos, New Mexico lab, “terrorists” gained entry and had time to construct an “Improvised Nuclear Device” – a homemade atomic bomb. DOE’s Transportation Security Division, which moves nuclear weapons and radioactive materials on public highways, failed six out of seven security tests in 1998.

**In real life, such failures mean plutonium and highly enriched uranium are subject to theft and sabotage.**

**DOE security failings are nothing new.** A 1999 review by former Senator Warren Rudman concluded, “More than 25 years worth of reports, studies and formal inquiries... have identified a multitude of chronic security and counterintelligence problems at all of the weapons labs....”

**The Department of Energy is a dysfunctional bureaucracy that has proven it is incapable of reforming itself.”**

Perhaps DOE will be forced to change given the post-9/11 emphasis on “homeland security.” We might soon find out: In response to POGO’s report, Representatives Chris Shays and Ed Markey have each initiated Congressional investigations.

**TomPaine.com – Easy Targets**

*Featuring excerpts from POGO’s report: “Chronic Insecurity: Three Case Studies”... “Whistleblowers: Shooting the Messenger”... and “Problems/Solutions.”*