



**Global Security Newswire**  
by National Journal Group

Daily news on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, terrorism and related issues.

## Homeland Security Delivers Nuclear Detection Plan to Capitol Hill

Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2011

By Martin Matishak

*Global Security Newswire*

WASHINGTON -- A key U.S. Homeland Security Department agency recently submitted to lawmakers the blueprint for the federal government's effort to prevent nuclear-weapon materials from being smuggled into the country (see [GSN](#), Oct. 1, 2010).



(Jan. 5) - A U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer stands nearby as a truck pulls a cargo container through a radiation portal scanner in 2007 at the Port of Palm Beach in Florida. The Homeland Security Department last month sent Congress a strategic plan for thwarting any attempt to illicitly transfer nuclear weapons material into the country (Joe Raedle/Getty Images).

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office delivered its long-awaited "strategic plan" for the global nuclear detection architecture to Capitol Hill on Dec. 20, according to DNDO chief Warren Stern. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano signed off on the plan that same day.

The detection architecture usually refers to the worldwide network of sensors, telecommunications, personnel and measures used to detect, identify and report the potential movement of illicit nuclear and radioactive materials or weapons.

"There's an important distinction between the architecture itself and the plan," Stern told *Global Security Newswire* yesterday in a phone interview. "The plan guides the development of the architecture."

The blueprint, which has yet to be made available to the public, details the detection office's vision for the system over the next five years as well as the objectives and performance metrics for the architecture, Stern said.

"The plan begins where any plan should, which is to define what it is we're working on. What is the architecture? Where does it begin and where does it end?" he added.

The 31-page document defines the goals of the architecture, including detecting nuclear and radioactive materials; communicating information to relevant agencies and officials; and coordinating with those partners to "minimize gaps and also remove overlaps," according to Stern, who was appointed to his post by President Obama last August.

In addition, the interdepartmental road map outlines the roles of a number of federal branches in preventing terrorists from detonating a nuclear or radiological device inside the United States, he said. Participating entities include the Defense, Energy, Justice and State departments, the U.S. national intelligence director and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The detection office was established by presidential directive in 2005 to coordinate federal efforts to protect the United States against nuclear terrorism. It was also designated to be the lead agency in domestic nuclear detection.

The office has received roughly \$4 billion in funding since its inception, according to a Government Accountability Office [statement](#) released last year. Some of that money went toward expanding existing programs at other DHS components, including deploying radiation portal monitors at U.S. points of entry.

The remaining funds supported various programs, including \$230 million over four years attempting to develop and field the Advanced Spectroscopic Portal detection system.

In October Stern testified before a Senate panel that Homeland Security had trained thousands of law enforcement officials in radiation detection as part of the architecture. It had also deployed about 1,500 radiation portal monitors and 3,000 hand-held detectors to the nation's borders to

support Customs and Border Protection and provided the Coast Guard with 6,500 detectors.

The office has also worked to bolster other nations' detection capabilities through programs such as the Energy Department's **Megaports Initiative**.

The accountability office first suggested formulating a strategic plan in 2001. Demand on Capitol Hill rose sharply last year after federal auditors released a **report** that concluded the Homeland Security Department's focus on fielding the next-generation radiation detection monitors had stalled the plan's creation (see *GSN*, July 1, 2010).

In the wake of the report, Senate lawmakers began calling more forcefully for the detection office to submit its strategy document before the end of the last calendar year (see *GSN*, Sept. 16, 2010).

"The sense I've gotten was there was a feeling in the urgency of the moment after DNDO was created, [Homeland Security officials] were looking at actual gaps; the idea of taking a step back, of creating a higher level strategic plan, didn't seem to be the right path," Stern told *GSN* yesterday in explaining why the architecture blueprint had not come together sooner.

The DNDO chief said the document received a "generally good reception" on Capitol Hill.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) "is pleased to receive DHS's first step towards developing a comprehensive global nuclear detection architecture and is studying it to determine how best to proceed," panel spokeswoman Leslie Phillips said yesterday in a statement to *GSN*.

The Connecticut lawmaker has been critical of the detection office in past, particularly regarding its lack of a strategic plan.

A spokeswoman for the House Homeland Security Committee said yesterday the panel is "generally satisfied" with the direction the detection office had taken in putting together the strategy. Committee lawmakers are set to visit Homeland Security headquarters tomorrow for a more in-depth briefing on the strategic plan, she told *GSN*.

The strategy document does not address costs, Stern noted. Instead, those figures are to be included in an upcoming status report of individual programs to combat nuclear smuggling, including how much has been spent to date on each effort. That report is due to Congress on March 31.

Separately, all of the federal departments involved in the effort will develop their own implementation documents that delve into greater detail about procedures, acquisitions, training techniques and other elements necessary to put the plan into effect, according to the DNDO head.

He added that while the detection office intends to have its implementation plan developed by the third quarter of this calendar year, there is no deadline for the other departments to complete their documents, nor are officials required to submit those plans to Congress.

Stern rejected the idea that his organization should mandate when other departments wrap up their plans, speculating that the interagency process might be inhibited by such a move.

"Going after other people's organizations' current responsibilities would be perceived that way and cause more push back than benefit," he said.

One nuclear security expert welcomed the development of the strategic plan.

"It's refreshing that they got the plan done and out," according to Charles Ferguson, president of the Federation of American Scientists, who has seen the strategy document. "From what I've seen it looks like a very sound plan in terms of that they involved all the relevant agencies and they clearly define the roles of all the agencies."

He declined to offer details of the plan.

Defining each agency's role was as important as outlining what equipment will be used in the envisioned architecture, Ferguson said, because "even if you have the best detection equipment in the world, if you didn't have the right training, you didn't have the right communications, you didn't have the right wiring diagram in terms of who is supposed to talk to whom during a crisis, it's not going to work properly."

Ferguson predicted the true test of the plan would come if there is an effort to smuggle nuclear-weapon material into the country.

"One, can they detect it? And two, what you do once you detect it? How you respond? Can you then coordinate with other agencies that then have to trace that material to its source?" Ferguson asked yesterday in a phone interview.

For his part, Stern said the detection architecture is "not just detectors. It's those things that, in my mind, are either detectors or one step removed from detectors and equally important. It involves the analysis and communication that makes the system work."

"We've made an implicit assumption that either we'll have no intelligence information and so we have detectors there just to find things that may pass by them or that we'll have lots of intelligence information" and a small group of experts can find the suspected material, Stern said.

"But in reality the more likely case is that there will be some intelligence information, not precise and not zero, so we need to develop an architecture that deals with that possibility," he added.

Some of that surge capacity would originate from the federal government, including the Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration, but some would also come from the roughly 15,000 state and local law enforcement officials across the country trained in radiation detection operations, according to Stern.

"That's where I look in the future," he said.