

U.S. takes threat of nuclear terrorism very seriously

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The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing on “Nuclear Terrorism: Providing Medical Care and Meeting Basic Needs in the Aftermath - The Federal Response.” Chairman of the Committee, Senator Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), said that although preventing a nuclear terrorist attack is the top priority, the risk is so real that serious preparations must be made for an attack on an American city.

Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) said that the majority of medical responders and general practitioners do not know how to handle a nuclear attack. She added that inaction would lead to enormous consequences.

David Paulison, an administrator at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said that although there is very little probability that a nuclear attack will occur, the impact would be very high. Preparation for a nuclear terrorist attack is one of FEMA’s greatest concerns. Craig Vanderwagen, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said that his department learned many lessons from events in Tel Aviv, London, and Madrid. Since those attacks, the department made many improvements in their response plans. He said that 87 percent of hospitals now participate in mass care programs to handle the influx of injured people in the case of an attack. James H. Schwartz, Chief of the Arlington Country Fire Department, an example from a local level, said that a mutual aid system between cities is necessary because no city can deal with a nuclear attack alone. He expressed a need for more information sharing, collaboration, and cooperation between cities and also between the local, state and federal levels.