

Bomb part were sneaked into 10 fed buildings  
By Joseph Weber  
The Washington Times  
July 9, 2009

url: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jul/09/10-federal-buildings-breached-by-investigators-fro/>

A congressional watchdog agency say its investigators easily sneaked bomb parts into 10 federal buildings and assembled them in bathrooms, prompting Congress to demand immediate fixes to the Federal Protective Service.

The finding by the Government Accountability Office were released Wednesday in a report that also stated the investigators "walked freely around several floors of these [high-level] facilities with the device in a briefcase."

FPS Director Gary W. Schenkel responded to the findings on Capitol Hill by telling the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs his efforts to better train contract security guards since taking charge two years ago is only 25 percent complete and more improvements will take at least a year.

Sen. Susan Collins, Maine Republican and committee member, said the U.S. does not have that much time.

"We need solutions right now," she said.

The report also concluded the agency cannot ensure its roughly 13,000 contract guards have adequate training to work at federal facilities and that it lacks adequate follow-up and oversight.

For example, prospective guards must complete 128 hours of instruction including eight hours of X-ray and magnetometer training. However, roughly 1,500 guards are assigned to posts in federal buildings despite having not received such training since 2004.

In one case, a guard accidentally sent an infant in a carrier through an X-ray machine.

The report also states a guard was found sleeping at his post after taking the prescription painkiller Percocet and that another discharged his gun in a restroom while practicing with it.

Mr. Schenkel said budget constraints have contributed to the agency's problems "but clearly there is a lack of oversight on our part."

He said changes have been made since he was briefed on the report several weeks ago, but he compared making improvements to needing 36 miles of ocean to turn around an aircraft carrier.

Mr. Schenkel also said an automated system in place next year will monitor guards at posts so supervisors will have less paperwork and more time to provide training.

"This is an unacceptable situation," said committee Chairman Sen. Joe Lieberman,

Connecticut independent. "We were not going to hold a hearing, but [the findings] are so jarring and unsettling."

Mr. Lieberman told Mr. Schenkel the report due in two weeks must include "immediate" corrective steps.

FPS protects about 9,000 federal facilities with a \$1 billion budget, 1,200 full-time employees and the contract guards.

Mr. Lieberman and Miss Collins said the agency would get additional resources if money was indeed the problem.

Among the 10 buildings that agents penetrated were two congressional offices and the departments of Justice, State and Homeland Security.

The investigators brought in the bombs in two parts -- a detonator and low-level liquid explosives, said Mark L. Goldstein, the GAO's director of physical infrastructure issues.

He said they gained access to the building by showing a state driver's license, walking through the magnetometer machines without incident and having their briefcases with the bomb material run through an X-ray machine undetected.

"At security checkpoints at three of the 10 facilities, our investigators noticed that the guard was not looking at the X-ray screen as some of the [bomb] components passed through the machine," Mr. Goldstein said. "At some of the facilities, the restrooms were locked. Our investigators gained access by asking employees to let them in."