

OPENING STATEMENT
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX)
Chairman, U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

*Keeping America Secure: The Science Supporting the Development
of Threat Detection Technologies*

Thursday, July 19, 2012
2318 Rayburn Office Building

Good Morning. I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing.

The September 11th terrorist attacks forced the American public to confront the daily threat of domestic terrorism. Advancing threat detection technologies is one of the many ways research and development contributes to keeping America secure. Recognizing the need to respond quickly when a potential threat is identified and to counter the growing list of threats to our country, the U.S. government and the private sector focused research and development activities on the detection of explosives, firearms, and dangerous materials including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear matter. Scientific research has advanced the development of technologies to protect the Nation, but the rapidly changing threats that we face require continued research and development to ensure that we keep ahead of our enemies. We recognize that the terrorists only need to get it right once to succeed, whereas we need to get it right every time to ensure the protection of our citizens.

In March of this year a Gallup poll¹ showed that terrorism ranked near the bottom of fifteen issues facing the country today – behind the economy, gas prices, unemployment, drug use, and the environment, among others. This may be partly because of the success we have had in protecting the Nation since 9/11. Economic issues dominate day-to-day concerns right now, so it is easy to become complacent about the threat of terrorism. However, with highly visible events such as the Olympic Games and the Democratic and Republican National Conventions occurring this summer, and major sporting events and concerts drawing crowds of thousands on a weekly basis, there is continued interest in improving existing threat detection technologies and advancing new ones.

Today, we have the opportunity to examine some of the research and development activities that the Federal government is undertaking to support the advancement of threat detection technologies. The National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, the National Science Foundation, and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory are all investigating different aspects of threat detection.

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153485/Economic-Issues-Dominate-Americans-National-Worries.aspx>

The research and development activities occurring at these federal agencies have the potential to both transform and improve threat detection, and to create products and technologies that could be beneficial for other purposes, such as nuclear applications for use in medicine.

While I recognize that threat detection is only one piece of a much larger system required to combat terrorism, better detection does enable better protection for our citizens. As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

I look forward to hearing more about the ongoing research designed to improve physical threat detection, protect the public, and support the development of marketable technologies.

Thank you to our witnesses for your willingness to testify before us today.

I yield back my time.