



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement from Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

NIST's Physical Security Vulnerabilities: A GAO Undercover Review

Chairman Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The GAO conducted a comprehensive review of NIST's physical security posture. They used covert tactics and they found gaping holes in the agency's ability to protect their campuses. Undercover agents succeeded in breaching numerous checkpoints.

Today, I want to thank GAO for their work. Their findings are alarming and confirmed our worst suspicions. NIST's campuses are sieves.

Let me remind everyone why we requested this GAO review.

On July 22, 2015, this Committee launched an investigation of NIST's security in the wake of a chemical explosion and fire at the Gaithersburg, Maryland, campus.

On July 18, 2015, the acting chief of the police services group or "PSG" attempted to manufacture the illegal drug methamphetamine in one of NIST's vacant laboratories. The local Gaithersburg, Maryland, police and fire departments responded to the scene and began a criminal investigation.

On January 7, 2016, this high-ranking PSG officer was sentenced to three and a half years in jail for manufacturing meth. Slowly we learned this was only the tip of the iceberg.

NIST personnel and the press shared anecdotes with the Committee that painted a dire picture of the security posture at both NIST campuses – Gaithersburg and Boulder, Colorado.

Some of these anecdotes were clearly workplace grudges; others were serious revelations of a culture of waste, fraud, and abuse pervasive amongst the Police Services Group.

According to a July 2016 Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General's report, the very officer who caused the explosion on NIST's campus also had committed time and attendance fraud by claiming hours that he did not actually work. He was not the only officer engaged in this misconduct.

The final straw for the Committee was the April 2016 incident in Boulder, Colorado, where an unknown individual was found wandering in a NIST building. After this incident, we contacted GAO and asked them to investigate.

While law enforcement personnel has stepped in and handled many of these incidents and the GAO has disclosed their findings to the Department and NIST, I am not convinced that NIST will achieve the necessary goal – a secure NIST compound at Gaithersburg and Boulder.

GAO, as I understand it, remains concerned that the Police Services Group and the security structure within NIST has not received proper scrutiny. A concern that is bolstered by the revelation that GAO agents successfully penetrated NIST campuses in 15 out of 15 attempts during their covert vulnerability testing.

Now that we have a new administration in place, a pending nominee for NIST Director, and GAO's recommendations, I urge NIST and the Department to work together for comprehensive security reform.

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