

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Continuing Concerns with the Federal Select Agent Program: Department of
Defense Shipments of Live Anthrax”
July 28, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

One year ago, we held a hearing to review an incident involving the handling of anthrax in Ziploc bags at the CDC – a troubling instance where safety practices were ignored despite the potential for lethal consequences. That should have been a wake up call, yet here we are a year later, examining yet another anthrax incident. This time it's the “inadvertent” shipment of live anthrax from a Defense Department lab in Dugway, an Army facility in Utah. These shipments went across our country and around the world. How? Dugway failed to inactivate anthrax and then failed to detect that the anthrax was still alive.

According to the Defense Department's most recent figures, live anthrax was shipped to at least 192 commercial companies, academic institutions, and federal labs. Since this anthrax was supposed to be “inactivated,” the controls over who received the shipments weren't as stringent as they might have been if it was known the anthrax was live. This is not just a public health concern, it is also a very real national security concern.

Just last week the Defense Department issued a report detailing its review of the events surrounding the shipments of live anthrax. The report acknowledged a lack of specific, validated standards to guide the development of protocols, processes, and quality assurance measures. In fact, in most cases, the Defense Department observed that each of its laboratories followed its own procedures and protocols.

We are reminded today, this is not an isolated incident. The Government Accountability Office, the nonpartisan government watchdog, highlights in written testimony that these “recent safety lapses have illustrated multiple breakdowns in compliance with established policies and inadequate oversight.” The committee remains concerned that oversight is fragmented because no single entity is in charge of overseeing high-containment laboratories that handle select agents.

We need to find out why these events keep happening and what the federal government plans to do to stop this troubling pattern of safety lapses at our bioterrorism labs. These blunders need to stop now. We need to learn from the mistakes of the past and stop repeating them once and for all. Otherwise I am afraid we'll be right back here next summer discussing the latest security lapse.

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