



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

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Media Contacts: Thea McDonald, Brandon VerVelde
(202) 225-6371

Statement from Chairman Darin LaHood (R-Ill.)

NIST's Physical Security Vulnerabilities: A GAO Undercover Review

Chairman LaHood: Good morning and welcome to today's joint subcommittee hearing: "NIST's Physical Security Vulnerabilities: A GAO Undercover Review."

Today we intend to discuss and evaluate GAO's report on its assessment of the physical security program at NIST—the public version of which is being released in conjunction with this hearing.

We will hear from GAO about the questions it sought to answer in undertaking its assessment, as well as the methods it used to assess the current physical security program at NIST.

We will also look at GAO's findings and the recommendations it has made with respect to the physical security program, and the steps NIST management must take to satisfy these recommendations and fortify its physical security.

Finally, as part of today's hearing, we will examine specific instances where physical security at NIST has failed. Specifically, an explosion that occurred in July 2015 at the NIST campus in Gaithersburg, which was caused by a security officer's attempt to illegally manufacture methamphetamine inside a NIST laboratory, and served as the catalyst for the Committee's investigation of physical security at NIST.

However, before we get to that discussion—in light of transparency—I would like to describe briefly for the public what occurred during the closed-portion of today's hearing.

Prior to gaveling into this open-session, Members of the Committee examined video evidence of recent physical security breaches at NIST campuses. These videos, captured as part of GAO's covert vulnerability testing, reveal NIST employees failing to adhere to established physical security policies. One video in particular shows an undercover GAO agent subverting detection by security personnel by employing very basic espionage techniques.

The evidence produced in these videos shines a light on the porous nature of NIST's physical security, and are particularly concerning to the Committee, especially in light

of the fact that the July 2015 meth lab explosion served to put NIST on notice that its physical security program was flawed.

While all of this is discussed in the sensitive version of GAO's report, it is discussed only briefly in the public version being released today. And while certain information is undoubtedly sensitive and must remain concealed from those who would use it for nefarious purposes, nothing I just explained rises to that level. In fact, I believe that this information is vital to ensuring that such breaches are prevented in the future at NIST and other federal agencies.

Before concluding, I would like to focus briefly on some positive aspects of GAO's report. Specifically, the report indicates that Commerce agreed with all of GAO's recommendations, which is the first step toward implementation.

Additionally, the report emphasized that NIST has taken some steps to further fortify and improve its physical security program. Specifically, GAO found that NIST management had three independent assessments of its physical security program conducted following the July 2015 incident, and that NIST has current plans to implement new physical security policies and procedures as the result of those assessments.

The work that NIST performs is extremely valuable to our nation. From development of the Cyber Framework to standards used throughout industry and academia alike, NIST's work must continue to thrive. In doing so, however, we must ensure the safety and security of those endeavoring to carry out the NIST mission, just as we must ensure the protection of physical and intellectual assets entrusted to NIST's care.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the status of these new policies and procedures, steps taken toward their implementation, and what NIST and Commerce intend to do in order to carry out GAO's recommendations.

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