

Review of the Protective Security of Hazardous Substances

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in his statement on 14 November 2007 a review of what more we need to do to strengthen security to protect against the use of hazardous substances for terrorist purposes.

This review has been completed. I do not intend to publish it because I do not wish in any way to compromise our security. However, this statement provides a summary of the main conclusions of the review.

The review shows that a substantial amount of work has been undertaken in this area. It also identifies areas where further improvements could be made but recognises that we must ensure that protective security measures are proportionate to the risk. We need to ensure that individuals and businesses are free to carry on normal social, economic and democratic activities and, as a result, there will always be some vulnerability to the use of hazardous substances for terrorist purposes.

First, it is important to underline that considerable progress has already been made in recent years to reduce our vulnerability to the use of hazardous substances for terrorist purposes. The National Counter-Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) provide specialist advice regarding the security of a variety of hazardous substances. They have undertaken a range of activities to reduce the vulnerability of hazardous substances. These include “Know Your Customer” campaigns to raise awareness about the ‘dual-use’ nature of certain products and encouraging suppliers to be more enquiring of new customers and to report suspicious enquiries to police. NaCTSO have also played an important role in overseeing the local police Counter-Terrorism Security Advisers who implement Part 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 which provides the police with powers to impose security measures at laboratories that hold certain dangerous pathogens and toxins.

The Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) is the Government authority on protective security in relation to national security threats. CPNI works with NaCTSO to advise businesses and organisations on the security of hazardous substances and sites.

The Environment Agency has managed a Government-subsidised programme that has disposed of more than 9,000 disused radioactive sources from hospitals, universities, museums, schools and other sites across the UK. The Environment Agency, and their sister agencies in Scotland and Northern Ireland, working in partnership with NaCTSO, are also regulating the security of radioactive sources used at hospitals, universities and industrial sites throughout the UK. This review did not cover those nuclear or radiological materials used within the civil nuclear sector, as they fall under the specific regulatory regime led by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security.

The Transport Security and Contingencies Directorate of the Department for Transport (Transec) enforces a statutory regime for the security of dangerous goods in transit. The Department for Transport’s Vehicle and Operator

Services Agency (VOSA) carries out inspections of vehicles at the roadside, and of road depots, on behalf of Transec. Transec's own inspectors carry out compliance activity for the movement of dangerous goods by rail in the UK.

The Government also welcomes the steps that industry has been taking, through a knowledge of its customers and through codes of conduct, to help reduce the chances of abuse of hazardous substances. For instance, the UK Fertiliser Industry has developed, at the request of the UK Government, the Fertiliser Industry Assurance Scheme (FIAS) scheme.

The main outcome of the review is a new risk-based strategic framework to drive prioritisation of work to reduce the accessibility of hazardous substances for terrorist purposes. This will enable work to focus on reducing the accessibility of hazardous substances considered to be at highest risk, taking account of the need for a proportionate, cost effective and practical response. This will allow us to target resources where most needed and to improve the security of hazardous substances even further.

The framework will direct a cross-Government programme of work to reduce the vulnerability of highest risk substances. This programme will be delivered under the "Protect" strand of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) and will be led by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office.

This framework has prioritised hazardous substances on the basis of the risk they pose, taking account of the threat, vulnerability and impact of those substances. The review examined the vulnerability of substances across their life-cycle (from their precursors through to their disposal).

We are reviewing the pathogens and toxins listed under Schedule 5 of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 with the assistance of the Health Protection Agency. We are also considering whether further legislative changes are required to clarify the scope of the application of the legislation, and will consult on any proposed changes in due course as appropriate.

Another example of specific work underway as a result of the review is a joint Department for Transport–Home Office project which has been established to agree an impact-based list of substances of most concern, to inform our assessment of the risk, and to identify areas for further reduction of the vulnerability of these substances throughout the supply chain, including transportation.

We will continue to reduce the risks from the illicit transportation of hazardous substances at the UK border. We will build upon existing initiatives such as Programme Cyclamen, which provides radiation screening capability at UK points of entry to prevent the illicit importation of radiological substances, and will use the strategic framework to inform counter-terrorism requirements at the UK Border, in conjunction with the UK Border Agency, the National Coordinator of Ports Policing and other stakeholders.

We are also considering what further work may be appropriate to reduce the vulnerability of hazardous sites and substances to insider action. This will build on existing work led by the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and take account of the findings of the independent review of personnel security in the transport sector by Stephen Boys Smith.

In taking forward this work, the Government recognises the importance of engaging fully with industry and academia. In particular, we are committed to working with them to identify proportionate, risk-based measures. Equally important is the need to work with international partners to reduce the risk of terrorists acquiring hazardous substances. For example, we are currently working with our European partners to reduce the availability of high-grade ammonium nitrate fertiliser.

Taken together, the various recommendations of the review will further reduce the risk of terrorists obtaining hazardous substances and will increase the likelihood that those attempting to access such materials will be detected.