



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Senator Susan M. Collins, Chairman

For Immediate Release

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Opening Statement
Senator Susan M. Collins
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chemical Facility Security: What Is the Appropriate Federal Role?
July 13, 2005

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Today marks the third in this Committee's series of hearings on the issue of chemical security. At our first hearing, we heard from experts about the potentially catastrophic impact of a successful terrorist attack on a chemical facility and how vulnerable many chemical sites are.

At the second hearing, the Department of Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency testified that current laws are not sufficient, and the Administration pledged to work with this Committee in developing appropriate legislation. At today's hearing, we will hear from a variety of witnesses who have a long-standing interest in the safety and security of chemical sites.

Let me take a moment to describe the chemical industry. By economics alone, it is impressive. The total value of chemical shipments in the United States approaches half a trillion dollars annually. The chemical industry represents our largest export sector, with exports totaling \$91.4 billion in 2003. More than 900,000 people work directly in the U. S. chemical industry, with an additional 700,000 supplier jobs and millions more in indirect jobs.

Perhaps even more significant than the economic impact is the impact of chemicals on our daily lives. Chemicals are necessary for more than 70,000 products that help make life in our country what it is today, and that help us achieve one of the greatest standards of living the world has ever seen.

How many people have enough food to eat because fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals have helped make America the breadbasket of the world? How many Americans would die of cholera and other diseases if we did not have chemicals to treat our water supply? How many children's lives are saved every year by the chemical compounds that make up prescription medicines? Where would we be without computers and other consumer electronics, which are not possible without chemicals?

It is an unfortunate fact of life that many things in this world which have the greatest capacity for good, also have the greatest capacity to cause harm. Chemicals fall into that category. While of immense benefit to society, chemicals can also cause tremendous damage. Since the first large-scale use of chemical weapons during World War I, chemicals have been the most used weapon of mass destruction by both governments and terrorists.

As we learned in chilling detail in this Committee's first hearing, even necessary and legitimate chemicals have an immense capacity to cause destruction.

It is a further fact of life that society often fails to appreciate the significance of a threat until a catastrophe occurs. For example, many of our most important chemical safety measures were not created until after the tragic deaths of thousands of civilians following a chemical accident in Bhopal, India. The creation of the Chemical Safety Board, as well as EPA's Risk Management Plan program, were both created in response to Bhopal.

Many companies have recognized the need for stronger security and have already taken strong steps to improve security at their chemical facilities. Many in the industry have subscribed to well-regarded voluntary programs such as the "Responsible Care" program. I applaud these efforts and strongly encourage the continuation of voluntary actions to improve security. Unfortunately, as the Department of Homeland Security has testified to at our earlier hearing, not all companies abide by such codes of conduct. I look forward to hearing from our first panel of industry representatives their views on the need for mandatory measures.

Our second panel consists of representatives from environmental, labor, and public advocacy groups. Environmental groups and other public advocates have long sought to increase public recognition of the risks inherent in operating large chemical facilities near large population centers. Similarly, labor representatives have long pushed for greater worker safety at chemical plants.

Given that the chemical industry presents both tremendous benefits as well as immense risks, it is critical that any legislation strike a carefully thought-out balance. Terrorists seek to use our infrastructure and assets to cause maximum disruption to our society and harm to our economy. In our search for a solution to the threats we face, we must be careful not to accomplish the terrorists' objectives for them.

I look forward to hearing from the industry, labor, and environmental groups in today's hearing. Their different views will be helpful to the Committee as we continue our work on this critical issue.

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