

Opening Statement

Senator Susan M. Collins

Chairman, Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs

“Chemical Facility Security: What Is the Appropriate Federal Role? (Part II)”

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Today, the Committee is holding its fourth, and final, hearing on the security of our nation’s chemical industry against terrorist attack. The goal of these hearings has been to help this Committee develop comprehensive, bipartisan legislation to address what clearly is one of our nation’s greatest homeland security vulnerabilities.

Through this series of hearings, we have learned that the United States is home to an astonishing number of facilities that manufacture, use, or store chemicals for legitimate purposes that could cause devastation if turned against us as weapons.

The Environmental Protection Agency has listed some 15,000 chemical facilities that produce, use, or store large quantities of hazardous chemicals. The Department of Homeland Security uses a different methodology, and has identified 3,400 facilities that could potentially affect more than 1,000 people if attacked, and nearly 300 chemical facilities where a toxic release could potentially affect 50,000 or more people. We have heard expert testimony regarding recent chemical accidents in our country that have resulted in injury and death.

We have learned that this industry is enormous, diverse, and vital to the American economy. The U.S. chemical manufacturing industry approaches half a trillion dollars annually in sales. 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, which supports an additional 700,000 supplier jobs and millions more indirectly. From national defense and high-tech to agriculture and health care, the chemical industry produces more than 70,000 products that improve the well-being of the American people.

And, we have been reminded that the terrorist enemy we face has a clear strategy of turning the tools of free and productive societies into weapons. They did it on September 11th, 2001. They did it in Madrid last year. And they have done it in London – not once – but twice – this month. Given the chance, they will surely do it again.

Currently, the federal government's regulation of the security of chemical facilities is limited. The Department of Homeland Security's representative has testified that new legislation is needed to strengthen the security of chemical sites. The Department points out that approximately 20 percent of the overall sector that it believes to be at high-risk does not subscribe to voluntary industry security standards. While I applaud those companies that have taken voluntary measures, an unacceptable number have not. Moreover, given the severity of the threat, I believe it is a mistake to rely on voluntary measures alone.

To date, we have heard from witnesses representing industry, labor and environmental associations, as well as chemical safety professionals, homeland security experts, and the Department of Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Today, we will hear from company security chiefs who will describe the day-to-day challenges of securing these sites. A local emergency manager with decades of experience in responding to chemical incidents will also testify.

And, we will hear today from the United States Coast Guard, which is responsible for implementing the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002. Throughout these hearings, the results-based, cooperative approach of MTSA has been described as a major security success story. Maritime commerce is no less diverse or vital to our economy than is our chemical industry, and the security issues are no less challenging. I will be interested to hear the Coast Guard's views on the extent MTSA could be used as a template for chemical security legislation.

I look forward to hearing from all of our expert witnesses today.