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A New Bid to Keep Nukes Safe

The Associated Press

LONDON -- New efforts are under way, including a program involving the United States and Russia, to safeguard dangerous radioactive materials that terrorists could steal around the world to build a "dirty bomb."

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report Tuesday such materials are easily available because more than 100 countries may have inadequate programs to prevent or even detect such thefts.

The IAEA did not list the countries that may have inadequate security programs. But it did identify one widely known problem area -- former Soviet states that have become a traffickers' marketplace for radioactive materials. The UN agency said "uncontrolled radioactive sources are a widespread phenomenon" in states such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

As part of a worldwide effort to improve security, the agency, Russia and the United States agreed on June 12 to develop a coordinated strategy to locate, recover, secure and recycle radioactive sources that are outside regulatory control in the former Soviet Union.

The Bush administration expects to spend \$20 million this year to find and protect such radiological materials in Russia and the former Soviet states, a spokesperson for the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration, a division of the Department of Energy, said Tuesday.

"This is a very important agreement," said Mark Gwozdecky, an IAEA director. "It addresses the region with the highest risk of large numbers of lost or 'orphaned' radiological sources."

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