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## Industry official admits N-plants may be vulnerable

### Hearst Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The nation's [nuclear](#) power plants could withstand an aerial assault similar to the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, a senior industry official said Monday.

However, Stephen Floyd, a director of the [nuclear](#) Energy Institute, conceded that in extreme circumstances the [nuclear](#) reactors and their highly radioactive fuel could be vulnerable.

Citing a study by the NEI, which represents the [nuclear](#) industry, Floyd said: "The preliminary results are that it is extremely unlikely that the aircraft would be able to penetrate the containment vessel."

The containment vessel — a domed building usually about 160 feet high and 130 feet wide — houses the [nuclear](#) reactor and fuel, which are encased in numerous steel and concrete shrouds several feet thick.

Some public safety groups have called for stationing air defense batteries around the nation's 103 functioning [nuclear](#) power plants for protection against attacks like those used against the Pentagon and World Trade Center.

The government is studying such unprecedented protection for the power plants, but the industry opposes the move fearing a commercial jet might be accidentally downed.

Protection of the plants is a top priority since September. The [nuclear](#) Regulatory Commission currently is conducting its own study about the ability of containment vessels to withstand direct hits by aircraft.

But Sen. Jim Jeffords, chairman of a Senate committee assessing the vulnerability of [nuclear](#) power plants to terrorist attacks, warned in a congressional hearing on June 5 that the NRC must do more to increase security at the atomic reactors.

Jeffords, an independent of Vermont, described a list of problems at power plants, including poor preparations for dealing with commando-style attacks, unrealistic assumptions of what constitutes an enemy threat and personnel troubles that undermine security.

Floyd told reporters that the NEI study, which will be completed by the end of the month, relied on computer modeling to determine what would happen if a Boeing 767 struck a containment vessel head on. Terrorists used two 767 jets to destroy the World Trade Center towers and a Boeing 757 to strike the Pentagon on Sept. 11. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attacks.

In the assumptions underpinning the scenarios that NEI assessed, the aircraft would be traveling at around 300 mph, like the plane that hit the Pentagon, not at a high speed like the two jets that struck the World Trade Center. The jet that destroyed the south tower was traveling close to 586 mph.

Floyd acknowledged that if a jet were to hit a reactor containment vessel at high speeds, then the structure might be penetrated, especially if the plane struck the containment vessel at the top, where the concrete and steel protective shells are thinnest. But, he added, the probability is extremely low because an airliner traveling at such a speed and at such an angle aiming for a low-lying building would be highly inaccurate

and aerodynamically unstable.

"The plane in all likelihood would destroy itself before it could hit the target," Floyd told reporters.

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