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## U.N. nuclear agency sees theft danger

By Thomas Wagner  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — More than 100 countries around the world may have inadequate programs to prevent or even detect the theft of radioactive materials a terrorist would need to build a "dirty bomb," a U.N. agency said yesterday.

Governments, including the United States, must take urgent steps to raise security to prevent theft and recover supplies that are missing, the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

"What is needed is cradle-to-grave control of powerful radioactive sources to protect them against terrorism or theft," said Mohamed El Baradei, the head of the IAEA.

Since the September 11 terror attacks, the organization has stepped up efforts to prevent terrorists from obtaining weapons-grade nuclear materials or radioactive sources for a "dirty bomb."

Fears of radiological terrorism grew when a purported plot to detonate such a weapon in Washington failed with the May 8 arrest of Abdullah al Muhajir, described by U.S. officials as a protege of Abu Zubaydah, a senior leader in the al Qaeda terror organization. Muhajir, a U.S. citizen, was formerly known as Jose Padilla.

Priority must be given to help states create and strengthen national regulatory infrastructures to ensure that radioactive sources are properly registered and secured, the IAEA said.

The IAEA did not list the more than 100 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 U.N. agency said "uncontrolled radioactive sources are a widespread phenomenon" in states such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Even the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has reported that American companies have lost track of radioactive materials within the country since 1996, much of which was never recovered, the IAEA said.

A European Union study estimated that every year up to 70 sources are lost from regulatory control in the bloc, and that a recent European Commission report estimated that 30,000 unused sources held in storage in the European Union are at

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risk of being lost from regulatory control, the IAEA said.

A "dirty bomb" is not a weapon of mass destruction like a nuclear bomb, but uses conventional explosives to disperse radioactive materials.

Nuclear experts say such an attack would kill no more people than a conventional bomb, but the dispersal of radioactive materials could lead to the exposure of some victims and cause widespread panic.

In its report, the IAEA identified radioactive sources used in industrial radiography, radiotherapy, industrial irradiators and thermoelectric generators as those that are the most significant from a safety and security point of view because they contain large amounts of radioactive materials.

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

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