

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

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### **EPA Found Unready for Terrorism; Report Says Chemical, Other Attacks Could Overwhelm Agency**

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An internal assessment of the Environmental Protection Agency's response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks concluded the EPA is "not fully prepared" to handle a large-scale nuclear, biological, chemical or radiological assault.

Although the EPA was generally successful in protecting frontline responders and residents from dust and contaminants released after hijacked commercial airliners crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the response was hampered by unprecedented demands on the agency's emergency resources and a limited capacity to respond to terrorist activities, according to the report.

The report strongly suggests that if the terrorist attacks had involved the use of chemical, nuclear or biological materials, the EPA emergency response teams would have been seriously overwhelmed.

"Agency information, experience and equipment is insufficient to respond with confidence," the report stated. "EPA has much work ahead to systematically identify and reduce national environmental vulnerabilities."

The study was commissioned by EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman to determine the "lessons learned" in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

The EPA is one of several agencies responsible for determining site safety for recovery workers as well as the health threats to people living near a contaminated area in the event of a nuclear, biological or chemical attack. Under federal law, the EPA is the primary agency for providing support to state and local governments in response to an actual or potential discharge of hazardous materials -- including nuclear, chemical and biological agents.

The 100-page report has been kept under wraps at the EPA since it was completed Feb. 1. Details of the report were first reported late last week by the New York Daily News, and copies were circulated yesterday by the environmental group Greenpeace. At the urging of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge

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will be questioned about the report's findings during a hearing Wednesday before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, according to a committee aide.

Ridge will be called to testify about the administration's plan to create a Department of Homeland Security to strengthen aviation and border security and to defend against biological, chemical and nuclear terrorism.

The EPA would not be directly affected by the proposed major consolidation and reorganization of all or parts of 22 departments and agencies. However, Clinton said recently the committee should explore the lessons learned by the EPA and "and ask the hard questions about what has changed since Sept. 11."

Clinton and Sen. Jon S. Corzine (D-N.J.) are pushing a bill to toughen chemical industry security standards, and they have criticized EPA and administration officials for failing to do more in this area.

EPA spokesman Joe Martyak yesterday described the internal agency report as part of Whitman's efforts to continually upgrade the EPA's "response mechanism and preparedness mechanism."

"This [report] is not meant to be a singular event but rather an ongoing effort for improving the way EPA operates in these areas," Martyak said. "We have been increasing our resources by hiring more personnel. Our response plans have been reexamined and revised, and EPA has been ramping up its activities to be even more prepared should any of these [terrorism] scenarios arise."

Among the findings of the report, prepared by Marianne Lamont Horinko, assistant EPA administrator for solid waste and emergency response:

\* EPA has some authority for addressing environmental vulnerabilities but limited authority to require action.

\* The potential resource demands of an actual nuclear or biological incident, in which the EPA would play a much more significant role, "should be a critical concern for the agency."

\* EPA should be better prepared to respond to national emergencies that include significant transportation system breakdowns.

\* The agency could not communicate quickly and effectively with small drinking-water and wastewater utilities because they lacked computers, full-time operators and, in some cases, telephones.

\* It took as long as two weeks to get air quality samples to first responders at the World Trade Center -- even as questions persisted about the safety of the air around the smoldering site.

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