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Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

CONCERNS ABOUT INADEQUATE SECURITY AT SOUTH TEXAS PROJECT

In February 2005, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) issued a backgrounder titled “Nuclear Security Enhancements Since September 11, 2001.”[#] The NRC outlined actions taken since 09/11 to improve security at U.S. nuclear power plants. The NRC listed:

- increased patrols,
- augmented security forces and capabilities,
- additional security posts,
- installation of additional physical barriers,
- vehicle checks at greater stand-off distances,
- enhanced coordination with law enforcement and military authorities;
- more restrictive site access controls for all personnel; and
- expanded, expedited, and more thorough employee background checks.

Since that time, numerous members of the security force at the South Texas Project have repeatedly reported serious problems in all these areas, with the exception of enhanced coordination with law enforcement and military authorities.* Their voices were heard, but in the improper context of making them targets for retaliation.* This report summarizes the concerns for each of the remaining areas of so-called improvement and in the related area of retaliation. This report does not catalog all of the concerns. Instead, the objective was to incorporate sufficient concerns and allegations to prompt authorities to promptly dispatch investigative teams to South Texas Project so its security problems can be corrected *before* someone exploits the many weaknesses. South Texas Project uses a contractor, Wackenhut Corporation, for security.

INCREASED PATROLS

Once a week, a vehicle used for fire-control purposes in event of a security incident leaves its designated parking spot near the reactor building inside the Protected Area and is driven on nearby Highway 521 to demonstrate its operability. Upon its return, this vehicle proceeds unsearched through the security fence and returns to its parking spot near the reactor building. Increased patrols of this nature actually reduce security levels. Routine opportunities for an outsider or an insider to plant an explosive device and/or weapon on this vehicle so it can be taken, Trojan horse-like, back into the plant unchecked are bad.

[#] Available online at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/security-enhancements.html>

^{*} The absence of concerns about this topic in the presence of so many concerns in each of the other topics raises the question of whether law enforcement and military authorities are even involved at all in the protective strategy for South Texas Project – their non-participation clearly could be one reason for the lack of concerns in this area.

^{*} A federal regulation, 10 CFR 50.7, protects workers from retaliation for raising nuclear safety concerns. South Texas Project and Wackenhut each have a history of retaliation. Both have been sanctioned by the NRC for violations in this area.

Increased patrols and increased security force staffing have value only when they are interwoven pieces of the overall security blanket. But in the words of a security officer at South Texas Project: *“Each guard on shift is issued a radio for communication between posts. Most of the radios don’t work properly. In the event of an emergency I can’t communicate to other officers around the facility.”*

The degraded condition of the floor in the crossover bridge, approximately 70 feet above the ground, between the turbine generator building and the diesel generator building made it hazardous to use during routine patrols, yet it served as a critical passageway for security officers responding to incidents. The security officer who raised a concern about this situation to Wackenhut supervisors was sent to the Continuing Behavior Observation Program – in other words, to the company’s psychiatrist. Another security supervisor initiated a condition report that finally got the floor fixed.

AUGMENTED SECURITY FORCES AND CAPABILITIES

The effectiveness of security forces and capabilities is evaluated in force-on-force drills that pit one or more mock intruders against the plant’s defenses. But the usefulness of these drills has been intentionally undermined. During a drill conducted at South Texas Project in September 2005 and observed by the NRC and FBI, the mock intruders were directed by their management to deliberately lose. In the words of one of the mock intruders, they *“were basically told to walk out there and get killed to make C-Team look good in front of our visitors.”* For example, the mock intruders were ordered not to use suppressive fire. Nevertheless, a mock intruder managed to get to the door of the fuel handling building poised to enter and simulate damage to the highly radioactive spent fuel. But the mock intruder was directed not to try. This force-on-force drill was a farce.

Security officers at South Texas Project have raised concerns about the failure to train as a team and to recognize other team members. During one drill conducted in 2005, a security officer was “shot” by “friendly fire.” This failure is exacerbated by the high turnover rate for security force personnel and the lack of and generally inappropriate training which impair cohesiveness and teamwork.

As recently as March 2006, the security force at South Texas Project identified a vulnerability in the protective strategy designed to protect the facility from attack to management. They *“shrugged their shoulders”* in response to the reported security vulnerability.

ADDITIONAL SECURITY POSTS

Some of the additional security posts installed at South Texas Project were so hastily and shabbily constructed that they become flooded during rainstorms. Moreover Wackenhut does not have a routine maintenance program set up to maintain these facilities to the standards they are expected to meet. Security officers within such posts have to disconnect power cords to avoid electrical shocks. The repeated complaints raised by security officers about this health hazard have netted promises repeatedly broken.

Some of the additional security posts provided at South Texas Project have no physical enclosure or barrier and are essentially X’s on the ground where security officers are to stand. Security officers contend this exposure violates their labor contract. More broadly, the security officers point out the impairment experienced by security officers standing out in the cold, or the driving

rain, or the sweltering heat in full body armor. The force-on-force drills are not conducted after the defenders have shivered in a refrigerated vault for two hours or endured a two-hour washdown from a fire hose or survived two hours inside a sauna with full gear, so its indeterminate whether such exposed posts afford any protection value.

Fog wreaks havoc with the security perimeter system at South Texas Project. Surveillance cameras go into a white-out situation while some of the intrusion detection equipment produces continuous alarms due to water droplet accumulations. The security officers manning designated posts cannot see through the fog to ascertain whether the alarms are valid or not. Comments by three security officers about this problem: *“A bad guy could have walked right through the outside alarm area and waited for someone to go through the card swipe gate, followed them in and gained access, and we wouldn’t have known,”* and *“It would be easy to breach those zones in the fog,”* and *“When we complained we couldn’t see, Wackenhut said, the NRC allows it.”*

INSTALLATION OF ADDITIONAL PHYSICAL BARRIERS

South Texas Project has an unsecured weapons locker where weapons, ammunition, and other security equipment is stored in a room that is key-card controlled. However, unauthorized individuals, including cleaners, maintenance technicians have access to this room and the weapons, ammunition and equipment contained within it. Individual(s) with malicious intent would thus not have to smuggle a weapon into South Texas Project – they need only “borrow” one from the easily accessible weapons locker.

VEHICLE CHECKS AT GREATER STAND-OFF DISTANCES

Vehicle checks at even the greatest stand-off distance are valuable only when those doing the checking have adequate means to do the checking. The training and subsequent practice for vehicle checks is inadequate. The training features a single dummy pipe bomb that is hidden somewhere on the vehicle for the security officer trainees to find. They are not trained to detect bombs made of plastic explosives or other devices.

In November 2005, a truck arrived at South Texas Project with construction materials for delivery inside the security fence. The materials could not be searched by security officers on the truck due to the loading and tie-down arrangement. Procedure called for the truck to be driven around to another gate where the materials could be x-rayed in substitution for the visual search. Instead, a Wackenhut security manager waved the unsearched and unescorted truck into the protected area where it parked about 40 yards from the building containing the spent fuel.

MORE RESTRICTIVE SITE ACCESS CONTROL FOR ALL PERSONNEL

On May 8, 2006, a convicted felon on parole from the Texas Correctional Facilities was allowed to enter the protected area at the South Texas Project. This same individual was allowed to re-enter the protected area the next day. A Wackenhut manager authorized the entries because the paroled felon was being escorted when inside the protected area. That same individual would not be allowed to enter the protected area without an escort because federal regulations say such individuals lack trustworthiness. Yet the escort for this trustworthiness-challenged individual need not be armed and need not carry a cell phone or radio to alert security should the paroled felon commence doing the kinds of things that rendered him untrustworthy.

EXPANDED, EXPEDITED AND MORE THOROUGH EMPLOYEE BACKGROUND CHECKS

Last fall, Wackenhut management at South Texas Project took disciplinary action against a security supervisor. They allegedly then asked another security force member to fraudulently fill out paperwork that would support their basis for the disciplinary action. When that person resisted, Wackenhut management allegedly ordered the falsified paperwork to be completed and signed. Under duress, the person followed the order.

Wackenhut Corporation also provides security at the Turkey Point nuclear plant in Florida. Early in 2006, two security officers sabotaged their weapons, their bullet-resistant body armor, and other security equipment. The background checks, behavior observation programs, and all failed to detect either individual as a potential threat until after the fact. Security officers at South Texas Project are aware of this event at Turkey Point. Their thoughts can be expressed in the written statement of one security officer at South Texas Project: *“Tensions at STP stem from the way Wackenhut trains its managers, and the practice of intimidation which is causing a hostile environment. I’m afraid officers may stop caring about security. I’m afraid something like Turkey Point (Fla.) is going to happen, because of the intimidation factor, where officers sabotaged their weapons and other equipment. STP is a really bad workplace right now.”* Such sentiments are reflected in the statement of another security officer at South Texas Project: *“What could cause an officer, in this case tow officers, to behave in this manner. There is only one answer to this, and it is their work environment, Wackenhut.”* The point being that the most effective background checks in the world go for naught if one’s spirit and motivation is subsequently broken inside the fences by an oppressive, hostile work environment.

SAFETY CONSCIOUS WORK ENVIRONMENT

The security officers at South Texas Project are members of Local No. 728 of the Security – Police – Fire Professional of America. The vice president of the local discovered in January 2006 that a Wackenhut manager was tracking his badge number on the security computer. This allowed the Wackenhut manager to monitor the vice president’s location as he used the badge to open security doors. While there are many legitimate reasons for monitoring individuals this way, the South Texas Project’s Employee Concerns Program determined that the vice president’s union activities were a factor. The following month, a Wackenhut supervisor attempted to write up the vice president for a safety violation for reporting to duty out of uniform. His offense – he had sunglasses perched on the top of his head. Two other security officers in the same briefing room at the same time with similar sunglass adornment were not written up. The very next day, the supervisor who had written up the vice president reported to duty with sunglasses.

A security officer who had raised concerns experienced retaliation shortly thereafter. The security officer was written up for arriving late to work and suspended for three days. Another officer who had arrived for work with this officer was neither written up nor suspended.

According to one long-time member of the security force at South Texas Project: *“I have raised concerns through Wackenhut’s “Safe to Say” program, STP’s Employee Concerns Program (ECP) and even to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The only result of this has been retaliation to me.”*

According to another member of the security force at South Texas Project: *“To keep your job at South Texas Project, working for Wackenhut, there’s one rule: Keep your mouth shut.”*

According to yet another member of the security force at South Texas Project: *“Officers are scared to report fatigue to Wackenhut or STP because of fear of retaliation.”*

In early 2006, a member of the security force at South Texas Project e-mailed the Manager of the Employee Concerns Program with a concern and asked that it not be passed along to Wackenhut for fear of retaliation. The concern and the name of its originator were communicated to Wackenhut management almost immediately.

In spring 2006, a security officer called in to request two days of emergency vacation due to a death in the family. The supervisor granted the request. The following day, Wackenhut management derided that decision and notified all supervisors that *“this isn’t the way we want to conduct business.”* Conducting business by forcing a bereaved relative to cover a security shift while understandably distracted by anguish and grief is inconsistent with adequate protection of a nuclear power plant.

In late spring 2006, an independent consultant surveyed the security guard force at South Texas Project. When the survey results were rolled out to the work force during briefings, questions about racism were rebutted by pointing out that only 30 percent of the guard force felt that racism was an issue. The fact that African Americans constitute close to 30 percent of the guard force was apparently not a consideration in determining whether racism was or was not a relevant issue.

The NRC received a letter on December 30, 2005, from members of the security force at South Texas Project. The first concern identified by these security officers was restated by the NRC as *“Attempts to resolve several issues with Wackenhut management has been met with hostility and has created a chilled work environment. This has created a hostile work environment that has affected the security officer’s ability to do their job effectively.”* The NRC investigated this and the other concerns expressed by the contingent of security officers. In April 2006, the NRC wrote to the group with the results of its investigation: *“The NRC has completed its review ... however due to the security-related issues associated with your concerns and to ensure that we are not unnecessarily releasing information that would reveal any potential security-related vulnerabilities, we cannot provide you with further information on this matter.”*

SUMMARY

Even one of the numerous concerns and allegations detailed above being valid means that the security risk for the South Texas Project is (a) violating federal regulations and requirements, and (b) posing an undue threat to nearby communities.

The security officers at South Texas Projects are the first line of defense against those wishing to do harm. Perhaps the only thing more important than their role is their perspective on how well they are prepared to carry out that role. Thus, their voices cannot be neglected, their concerns not downplayed, their preparedness not undermined.

It is imperative that the concerns raised by the security officers at South Texas Project be immediately, impartially, and completely investigated and all identified problems corrected expeditiously. The last thing this nation needs is another post-mortem cataloging all the deficiencies long known about but never resolved that would have averted tragedy.