

U.S.: Nuclear Plant Cheated During Drill

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By DUNCAN MANSFIELD, Associated Press Writer

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - Security guards at the nuclear weapons plant in Oak Ridge stunned inspectors in June by successfully repelling four simulated terrorist attacks — a feat computer programs predicted wouldn't be done.



That apparent success was tarnished, according to the Energy Department: Employees of an outside security contractor were tipped off about the impending simulations, making the tests a costly waste of time.

A broader investigation uncovered more evidence of cheating during mock attacks at the plant over the past two decades, including barricades being set up before the test to alter the outcome and guards deviating from the established response plan to improve their performance.

"There's no point in doing them if you have people who are going to cheat," said Richard Clarke, a former senior White House counterterrorism official. "That's ridiculous. It kind of defeats the whole point of having these tests."

The department's inspector general, Gregory H. Friedman, issued a report concluding the June drills at the Y-12 nuclear facility were "tainted and unreliable" because two guard supervisors from Wackenhut Corp. were allowed to see computer simulations one day before the attacks.

Friedman's investigators also said they received "compelling testimony" from more than 30 former and current security officers at Oak Ridge that this was part of "a pattern of actions ... going back to the mid-1980s that may have negatively affected the reliability of site performance testing." Each mock attack cost as much as \$85,000 to stage, Friedman said.

The plant paid Wackenhut award fees of \$2.2 million and rated its work "outstanding" for the period through July 2003. The cheating reported by the inspector general had taken place just weeks earlier.

A senior vice president for Wackenhut Services Inc., Jean Burleson, described details in the inspector general's report as "old news," which he said "may or may not have occurred." Burleson added: "There is no impropriety right now going on. Security is better today than it has ever been."

Burleson acknowledged that two guard supervisors saw the exercise plans the day before the drills. But he said they were filling in for two absentee supervisors who had reviewed the same material with other supervisors two weeks before. The reason for the advance review, the company argues, is that that particular drill was not intended to be a surprise drill but rather an exercise designed to improve computer simulations of security measures.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, an agency within the Energy Department which protects nuclear plants, said in a letter disclosed Monday that it already has taken unspecified action.

The inspector general said guards in another mock attack in late 2000 or early 2001 were improperly told which building would be attacked, the exact number of attackers and where a diversion was being staged. Investigators also said managers substituted their best security guards for others scheduled to work the day of attacks, and standby guards would sometimes be armed and used to bolster existing security guards on duty.

In other cases, security guards disabled laser sensors they wore to determine whether they received a simulated gunshot. Guards removed batteries, deliberately installed batteries backward and covered sensors with tape, mud or Vaseline so they wouldn't operate properly.

Such cheating is "not uncommon at all," said Ronald Timm, president of RETA Security Inc. of Lemont, Ill., a consulting company that has worked with the Energy Department to analyze vulnerabilities at its plants. "Most security forces don't like to lose; they go through great lengths to cheat to win. A loss is considered a negative mark against them."

Investigators said the claims they heard were based on interviews with current and former guards, which they described as "credible and compelling." But they acknowledged they could find no documentary evidence to support the claims of previous cheating.

The inspector general said having security supervisors know about a pending mock attack would have revealed important details that would tip off the guards about what methods to help neutralize the assault.

"It's blatant cheating," said Peter of the Project on Government Oversight, a Washington-based watchdog group. "It doesn't say much for the integrity of the guard forces and some managers who knew this kind of thing was going on."

Computer models had predicted guards at the plant would decisively lose at least two of the four simulated attacks, all on June 26. Two other guards identified as improperly looking at the plans in advance denied doing so, the report said. A suspicious site manager began investigating after the tests.

"I understand the perception, but the fact is there was nothing wrong with what occurred," said Burleson, the Wackenhut executive. "If we had lost the exercise, it wouldn't have been an issue because they expected us to lose the exercise."

Citing the federal Privacy Act, the inspector general's report did not identify any of the Oak Ridge guards. Security at the plant is handled by Wackenhut, the largest supplier of guards for U.S. nuclear facilities, including the Nevada Test Site, the Savannah River Site in South Carolina, Colorado's Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site and the Nonproliferation and Nuclear Security Institute in Albuquerque, N.M.

The Y-12 plant, about 20 miles west of Knoxville, makes parts for every warhead in the U.S. nuclear arsenal and is a major storehouse for bomb-grade uranium.

On the Net:

Energy Department Inspector General: <http://www.ig.doe.gov/pdf/ig-0636.pdf>

Y-12 National Security Complex: <http://www.y12.doe.gov>

Wackenhut Corp.: <http://www.wackenhut.com>