



## Savannah River Site DOE Mock Attacks Test Security

Josh Gelinas; South Carolina Bureau, November 2, 2003

Decked out in camouflage fatigues and black ski masks, 15 men from the Savannah River Site's equivalent of a SWAT team prepared for a mock terrorist attack.

They gathered in a single-file line carrying M-4 semiautomatic rifles and snaked through an abandoned building. The men fired at several paper targets, including one that resembled baseball star Sammy Sosa holding a revolver.

If the nuclear facility is attacked, it'll be a well-planned scheme orchestrated by someone more like Osama bin Laden, depicted with a machine gun in another poster nearby, security experts say.

The site's hockey-puck-size discs of plutonium and enriched powder uranium have the potential to cause mass casualties, making SRS a desirable target for unsavory characters.

The site has been on heightened alert since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, and the Department of Energy has increased its security budget from \$99.5 million in 2001 to \$116 million in 2003. It has requested \$157 million for 2004.

The increase reflects an effort by the DOE to stay ahead of threats, but officials are reluctant to release details about site defenses, a posture stiffened by critical reports about safety at other nuclear installations.

DOE tests security by conducting mock attacks, meant to simulate an outside intrusion by terrorists. According to experts cited in a report by the Project for Government Oversight, "the government fails to protect against these attacks more than 50 percent of the time."

The report states that in 2000, mock terrorists gained control of nuclear material at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. During a separate staged attack there, an Army Special Forces team was able to "steal" enough weapons-grade uranium for many nuclear weapons and carry it out in a Home Depot shopping cart.

"The DOE bureaucracy portrays facilities as being secure and impervious to terrorists and spies, when, in fact, they are not," the report states.

Peter Stockton, a special assistant to then-DOE Secretary Bill Richardson from 1999 to 2001, is a paid consultant with the oversight group.

"Generally the understanding was that Savannah River was slightly better than most of the others," he said. "They took security more seriously."

He would not say how much DOE had increased the potency of its testing attacks at SRS, because that information is classified. Site officials would not comment.

"You're talking about what we have to protect the site, and that's just not something we want out in the public domain," said Rob Davis, a spokesman for Wackenhut Services Inc., which controls security at the site. "We feel that SRS is a safe facility."

About 600 uniformed security officers work at the site, but not all of them are trained members of the SRS Special Response Team, Mr. Davis said.

Included among the team's instructors are two former members of the Army's Special Forces and a former Marine who saw combat duty in Lebanon.

During a recent response-team training session, Mike Howard, a sturdy man with a chiseled jaw, barked orders from atop scaffolding overlooking the hollowed building.

The training, he said, would season the team for the real thing. Members of the team train every week.

"When you go in, always look at the hands," he advised. "That's what kills a person, the hands."

Critics say DOE testing isn't realistic and is too easy on Special Response Teams. The government alerts security forces months ahead of time and gives the date of the attack, Mr. Stockton said.

"You're playing laser tag," he said. "You're fairly courageous under those circumstances."

Since 9-11, every government vehicle is inspected before entering the site, and every employee is inspected before entering a secure facility.

There are sensors and video cameras that survey such areas, concrete barricades that prevent vehicles from getting too close and around-the-clock armed guards.

"To figure someone's going to break in there and break out with materials is pretty far-fetched," DOE spokesman Bill Taylor said. "Most threats are going to be easily recognized and readily defended."

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