

NORTHEAST TARRANT
Star-Telegram

WESLEY R. TURNER, President and Publisher

PAUL K. HARRAL
Vice-President, Editorial Director

JIM WITT
Senior Vice President and Executive Editor

NORTHEAST EDITION

STEVE JACOB, Publisher

MIKE NORMAN, Editorial Director LARRY LUTZ, Editor

Earning the People's Trust Daily

Pulitzer Prizes: 1981, News Photography ■ 1985, Public Service

EDITORIALS

Nuclear nightmares

Serious questions are being raised as to whether America's nuclear facilities have adequate security programs in place to thwart terrorist attacks.

Security operations are being weakened by deteriorating training programs, personnel shortages and employee fatigue resulting from excessive overtime work, according to federal inspectors and a public watchdog group.

Ten nuclear weapons facilities, including the Pantex site near Amarillo, have reduced or eliminated key elements of a training curriculum designed in part to fend off terrorists, the Department of Energy's inspector general reported Tuesday.

Pantex, the nation's only facility where nuclear weapons are assembled, drew dubious attention in January after disclosures that workers taped together broken pieces of a high explosive being removed from the plutonium trigger of an old warhead. A federal oversight agency said the incident risked a "violent reaction."

The Washington-based Project On Government Oversight, or POGO, charged last week that the nation's 65 nuclear power plants are "not even close" to being prepared against terrorist threats.

TERRORISM The nation's weapons facilities and power plants must be fully prepared to counter potential attacks.

Most plants would have to quadruple their security to adequately deal with a terrorist strike, said POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian.

The admonitions should cause operators of nuclear facilities to at least re-examine their training programs and staffing levels to ensure that safeguards are adequate.

The closest nuclear facility to Tarrant County is the Comanche Peak power plant at Glen Rose, 45 miles southwest of Fort Worth.

Officials of Dallas-based TXU, owner and operator of Comanche Peak, previously have stressed that they significantly enhanced security after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and have taken "appropriate measures" to guard against hostile actions.

Strong training programs and adequately staffed security teams are crucial to ensuring that terrorists will fail if they attack a nuclear facility.

Everyone must remember that complacency is among America's deadliest enemies in its effort to foil future terrorist acts on American soil.