



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Martha McSally (R-Ariz.)  
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications**

**“Weapons of Mass Destruction: Bolstering DHS to Combat Persistent Threats to America”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

We know that terrorist groups have long strived to employ chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear, or CBRN, materials in their attacks. The Director of National Intelligence testified in February that weapons of mass destruction continue to be a major threat to the security of the U.S. He noted that biological and chemical materials and technologies, as well as personnel with the expertise to use and design them, move easily in the economy. The DNI also stated that infectious disease continues to threaten our security and that a more crowded and interconnected world is increasing the opportunities for human and animal diseases to emerge and spread globally.

Experts suggest that terrorist interest in utilizing chemical agents has increased. In fact, reports indicate that ISIS may currently be conducting attacks using chemical agents in Syria and Iraq. Last summer, a laptop reportedly retrieved from an ISIS hideout in Syria contained plans for weaponizing bubonic plague and a document discussing the advantages of using biological weapons.

Earlier this year, the Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee held hearings on chemical and biological threats. In addition to the severity of the threat, these hearings highlighted a number of crosscutting themes. Witnesses testified about the need for robust information sharing among all levels of government, and I have introduced a bill to address this aimed at enhancing CBRN intelligence and information sharing, which recently passed the House. We also repeatedly heard about the importance of strong, coordinated leadership on these threats.

Which brings us to the purpose of our hearing today: DHS must play a leading role in defending our homeland from CBRNE threats. In my first six months in office, I’ve gained an appreciation of the work of the Office of Health Affairs (OHA) in this space.

As the coordinator for chemical defense at DHS, OHA works with Federal, state, and local partners to enhance preparedness and response capabilities for an attack or incident involving chemical agents, as we recently saw in a chemical defense pilot with the City of Baltimore mass transit system.

In addition to managing biological surveillance and detection systems for the nation, OHA coordinates the Department's efforts related to biological threats, such as anthrax and Ebola.

OHA also recently completed an interagency effort to develop guidance for emergency response providers to increase survivability of victims as well as safety of responders after an attack using an improvised explosive device.

Despite this good work, the Department's chemical and biological efforts have not been without their challenges.

These are serious threats and I look forward to hearing from our DHS witnesses on how the Department is addressing them. I am also interested to hear from both panels how the proposed reorganization will elevate the CBRNE mission and provide strong leadership to ensure the Department is able to meet these threats.

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