



COMMITTEE ON  
**HOMELAND  
SECURITY**  
DEMOCRATS

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

***Industry Views of the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards Program***

**Subcommittee on Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Protection**

**February 15, 2018**

Through the CFATS program, DHS works with operators of high-risk chemical facilities to ensure that security measures are in place to prevent a bad actor from using on-site chemicals in a terrorist attack.

Make no mistake – the possibility that a terrorist could use a chemical plant as a weapon of mass destruction is not mere conjecture.

It is a credible threat that has been echoed by security experts at the National Infrastructure Protection Center, the Homeland Security Council, and high-ranking officials throughout the U.S. government, including former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, President Barack Obama, and even the Chairman of this Committee.

We have seen terrorist plots targeting chemical facilities including one of the 9/11 hijackers who we later learned had been scouting U.S. chemical plants.

Many of these at-risk facilities are not located in remote areas.

In a 2014 study, the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform found that more than 130 million Americans live, work, and go to school in the shadow of at-risk chemical facilities.

The study also found that there is a concentration of such facilities in low income communities and communities of color – with higher poverty rates and lower housing values.

In the event of a terrorist attack on a chemical facility, these Americans would most directly be harmed.

Indeed, in 2013, a fertilizer plant explosion in sparsely-populated West, Texas leveled nearby schools, houses, commercial buildings, and even retirement homes.

A dozen first responders lost their lives, in part because they did not know the chemical composition of the fire.

Despite the fact that this facility had reported its holdings to other Federal and State regulators, DHS was not aware that this at-risk facility even existed.

We learned some hard lessons after West – and tragically, I fear we may not be done learning them.

I worry that the Department is still not sharing CFATS information with State and local emergency responders, police departments, and firefighters.

I also worry that the program may be too focused on large operations with security teams and regulatory affairs departments and may not be giving needed attention to small so-called ‘outlier’ facilities, those facilities that fly under the Federal radar but could nonetheless be at risk.

Many of these facilities operate in areas with volunteer firefighters without specialized training and resources.

As the Congressman for a rural area and a former volunteer firefighter, I am deeply troubled by this.

The authorization for the CFATS program expires in December of this year.

Although we are late in beginning our reauthorization efforts, I believe we still have time to identify opportunities to incrementally improve the program.

As authorizers, however, the most important thing we must do is actually get reauthorization across the finish line.

We cannot afford to tie CFATS to temporary reauthorizations through the annual appropriations process again as we did in the first seven years of the program.

I look forward to hearing from the panel about their experience with CFATS, and I hope that I can impress upon my colleagues across the aisle the need to take swift action to move forward with reauthorization.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

