



News from Congressman

Tom Lantos

**12th Congressional District of California
San Mateo/San Francisco**

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FOR INFORMATION CALL
Lynne Weil (202) 225-6735

Lantos, Shays Bill to Prevent High Explosives Nationwide From Being Stolen Again

Washington, DC – Congressman Tom Lantos today announced the introduction of a bipartisan bill to fill a serious gap in homeland security: the lack of accountability for safekeeping of high explosives that are currently stored by law enforcement agencies in countless locations nationwide.

The Law Enforcement Explosives Storage Enhancement Act requires local law enforcement agencies that keep high explosives to report the storage sites to federal authorities and to have video surveillance or an alarm system at the sites. It also establishes a matching grant program to cover the additional security costs. Lantos co-sponsored the bill with Rep. Christopher Shays (R-CT), who convened a subcommittee hearing on the subject in August at the request of Lantos, a senior House Government Reform Committee member, after high explosives had been stolen from a barely secured law enforcement storage shed in San Mateo.

"I was shocked at the abysmal performance by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), which is tasked with the responsibility of regulating the sale of explosives in our country," Lantos said. "During the hearing, it became quite clear that ATF had absolutely no idea of how many explosive storage sites there are in this country. Given the fact that our country uses about 2.5 million metric tons of explosives every year, the idea of any of it being unaccounted for should concern all of us. Equally troubling was the revelation that there is minimal regulation of the storage of these hazardous explosive materials by law enforcement agencies, which means that communities across this country face a menace that we need to address right away."

Congressman Shays, the chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, said he was eager to see the bill passed. "While it is not possible to eliminate the vulnerability of all attractive terrorist targets throughout the country, strategic improvements in security can make it more difficult for attacks to succeed and can lessen the impact of attacks that do occur," Shays said. "This legislation will help make storage sites safer and more secure. I look forward to working further with Mr. Lantos on this bill."

Lantos noted that "there are obvious and logical reasons for local law enforcement agencies to have explosive materials," but he called the lack of clear guidelines and enforcement of safety standard for storage "very troubling," particularly in light of the increased use of explosives in incidents of terrorism worldwide, and the national awakening to the threat of terrorism in the United States after September 11, 2001.

"The existing regulations, such as they are, set a September 10th standard that is unacceptable in a September 12th world," he said. "We need federal standards that will be enforced across the country."

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