

SFGate.com www.sfgate.com

[Return to regular view](#)

SAN MATEO COUNTY
Stolen explosives inspire Lantos bill
It would give feds authority over how
materials are stored

- [Ulysses Torassa, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)
Wednesday, September 29, 2004

A bill to extend federal authority over how local governments store explosives should fill a "gaping hole" in homeland security that allowed thieves to walk away with police explosives in San Mateo County, the measure's sponsor said Tuesday.



Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, introduced the legislation Tuesday in response to the theft in July of more than 200 pounds of explosives from a storage bunker on the Crystal Springs watershed. The site was used by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, San Francisco police and the FBI.

The explosives were later recovered, and four men were charged. But the incident threw a spotlight on the federal government's inability to require local agencies to store explosives securely. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has that authority over private entities.

Lantos' bill would require the U.S. attorney general to keep an up-to-date list of places where public agencies keep explosives. Those sites would have to be equipped with electronic surveillance devices and alarms.

Agencies that failed to comply would lose 10 percent of the money they receive in grants from the U.S. Justice Department.

The bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Chris Shays, R-Conn., came out of hearings held in August in which members of Congress were told that no one in the federal government knows how many or where such storage facilities exist. Lantos said he expected the bill to meet with little opposition.

"It's absurd to talk about homeland security in the abstract, to move from yellow to orange, while not dealing with a gaping hole in our homeland security system, namely the storage of explosives by public entities," he said.

In the San Mateo County case, the explosives were stored in four sheds, only one of which had an alarm. That alarm had been broken for years.

The agencies that used the site have since moved their explosives to a fenced location with security cameras and alarms.

E-mail Ulysses Torassa at utorassa@sfchronicle.com.

Page B - 7

URL: [http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?](http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/09/29/BAGU590OIR1.DTL)

[file=/chronicle/archive/2004/09/29/BAGU590OIR1.DTL](http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/09/29/BAGU590OIR1.DTL)

[©2004 San Francisco Chronicle](#) | [Feedback](#) | [FAQ](#)