

THE DAILY JOURNAL

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POLICE NEWS

Explosives tracking legislation introduced

By Dana Yates, Daily Journal staff

In response to the recent theft of 200 pounds of explosives from a bunker at Crystal Springs Reservoir, U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, introduced legislation yesterday to track and regulate the storage of dangerous materials by public agencies.

“It is absurd to talk about homeland security in the abstract, to move from the yellow to orange, while not dealing with a gaping hole in our system,” Lantos said yesterday.

The “gaping hole” was apparent when a storage facility in Crystal Springs Reservoir was broken into. The theft included more than 200 pounds of explosives — including blasting caps and 10 pounds of C4 plastic explosives. During a recent congressional hearing, federal officials admitted there was no comprehensive list of facilities across the country where explosives are held.

Only a pound of C4 was used to bring down Pan Am flight 103 in 1988 that killed 270 people, an explosives expert testified during the hearing.

The new legislation, introduced by both Lantos and U.S. Rep. Christopher Hayes, R-Conn., requires states to submit a complete list of all public agencies storage facilities to the U.S. Attorney General within six months of the bill's approval. Each facility will be required to have electronic monitoring and alarm systems. It also gives authority to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to inspect the facilities.

There is no estimate on how much it will cost the ATF, but Lantos anticipates the federal agency will conduct a study and request additional funds during the next budget hearing.

The Department of Justice can revoke 10 percent of an agency's federal grant money if it doesn't comply. That's millions of dollars that would be redistributed to other public safety agencies throughout the country, Lantos said.

If the bill passes, the DOJ would be charged with creating the deadline when agencies must comply.

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The bill is a direct result of an Aug. 3 congressional hearing in San Mateo to investigate the theft at Crystal Springs Reservoir over the July 4 weekend. Three people were later arrested and two have pled guilty for the theft.

Dana Yates can be reached by e-mail: dana@smdailyjournal.com or by phone: (650) 344-5200 ext. 106. What do you think of this story? Send a letter to the editor: letters@smdailyjournal.com

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