

DOE Blamed for Compromised Security Test

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A federal investigation into how guards at a Tennessee nuclear weapons plant got copies of questions in advance of a written security skills test has called on the Department of Energy to improve its oversight of private contractors.

DOE inspector general Gregory H. Friedman said in a report Wednesday the questions were widely distributed among security officers at the Y-12 plant in Oak Ridge. Similar compromises may have occurred at other DOE sites and not been discovered, the report concluded.

"The failure to properly safeguard the test prior to its administration, especially given the intense focus on Y-12 and the security concerns at the site, was, in our opinion, inexplicable and inexcusable," the report said.

The plant came under scrutiny after it took hours for guards to respond July 28 when three anti-nuclear protesters cut perimeter fences, made their way to the building that houses the nation's bomb-grade uranium and defaced it with spray paint and blood.

The report said the "eyes on, hands off" approach to contractor governance by the National Nuclear Security Administration, the DOE agency responsible for nuclear facilities, contributed to the security test being compromised in August when a copy was sent to security contractor WSI-OR.

In a written response, DOE's Office of Health, Safety and Security challenged the oversight recommendation, saying the high cost would outweigh the benefit.

A spokesman for DOE in Oak Ridge didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. NNSA spokesman Steve Wyatt declined to comment.

The investigation into the leaked test began after a DOE security official inspecting operations at Y-12 found a copy of it in a WSI-OR patrol car Aug. 29. The written test was to be given to guards the next day. DOE canceled the exam and rewrote the test, the inspector general's draft report said.

The test materials were sent to WSI-OR because the federal government's security official at Y-12, who wasn't identified by name, said he wasn't qualified to review the test and offer suggestions for improvements, the report said. The security office confirmed that federal officials overseeing the sites often lack detailed knowledge about security needs.

"While one would expect that in normal situations testing materials would be withheld from the entity being tested, we learned that such was not the case in the

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Y-12 situation," the report said.

The government sent the test in an encrypted email to Y-12's primary contractor, B&W Technical Services Y-12, which then forwarded it to a WSI-OR manager. The report found the test eventually went to shift captains and their subordinates, who treated the document as a "training aid."

The report said claims by WSI-OR employees that there was no intent to cheat were questionable but it couldn't disprove them.

The report found that the email didn't specifically instruct the recipient to keep the test secret. The security employees told the inspector general's office they hadn't noticed the document's headline, which read "Y-12 Protective Force Test Key."

The inspector general also reported that B&W suspected WSI-OR of trying to cover up efforts to cheat on the test but the investigation couldn't prove that.

WSI-OR was fired Oct. 1 because of the July intrusion.

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