NTI Partners with New York City on First-of-its-Kind, Citywide Approach to Remove Radiological “Dirty Bomb” Risks

NEW YORK – Today, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene announced a first-of-its-kind, innovative program to replace high-activity radiological sources with effective alternative equipment at hospitals, medical facilities and blood banks throughout New York City. This will significantly reduce the risk of a radiological “dirty bomb.”

The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI)—in cooperation with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Mount Sinai Health System and the U.S. Department of Energy—has served as a key partner in this two-year effort.

"This is an unprecedented, citywide approach to reducing the risk of a radiological dirty bomb," said former Senator Sam Nunn, NTI's co-chairman, who participated in the announcement event. "The New York City Department of Health and Mount Sinai Health System are real innovators and should serve as models for other major cities and medical facilities throughout the United States. We are delighted to partner with them."

About the Threat

The ingredients for a radiological "dirty bomb"—the very same isotopes that can make life-saving blood transfusions and cancer treatments possible—are located at thousands of sites in more than 150 countries, many of them poorly secured and vulnerable to theft. As a result, experts believe that the probability of a terrorist detonating a dirty bomb is much higher than that of an improvised nuclear weapon.

The vulnerability of these radiological sources, particularly those used in blood irradiators in hospitals and other open environments, has caused concern for years—but today the risk is growing. Radical terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State have said they are looking to acquire and use radioactive material in a dirty bomb. In 2016, Belgian investigators discovered terrorists monitoring an employee at a highly enriched uranium reactor that also produces medical isotopes for a large part of Europe.

Over the past several years, technological advances have made it possible to replace radiological sources with effective alternative x-ray equipment, and, in 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the use of non-radioactive x-ray equipment for sterilizing blood.

About the Nuclear Threat Initiative

The Nuclear Threat Initiative works to protect our lives, environment, and quality of life now and for future generations. We work to prevent catastrophic attacks with weapons of mass destruction and disruption (WMDD)—nuclear, biological, radiological, chemical, and cyber. Founded in 2001 by former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn and philanthropist Ted Turner, who continue to serve as co-chairmen, NTI is guided by a prestigious, international board of directors. Ernest J. Moniz serves as chief executive officer and co-chairman; Des Browne is vice chairman; and Joan Rohlfing serves as president.

NTI works both domestically and internationally with government and industry on strategies to secure and eliminate dangerous radiological materials. NTI's initiative to replace blood and research irradiators is one element of our program to reduce radiological risks.

For more information, visit "Preventing a Dirty Bomb."

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