

ERDA FACT SHEET
NUCLEAR EMERGENCY SEARCH TEAM (NEST)

A special group of scientists, engineers and technicians has been formed by the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) to provide technical assistance to the FBI in responding to nuclear threats.

¶ The group is called the Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST) and may be used to help investigate the threatened theft or use of radioactive explosives or conventional explosives devices that might scatter nuclear materials. The radiation detectors used by NEST are transported during the search by walking personnel, small van or boat, or aircraft. Appropriate elements of NEST can be mobilized in two hours and may be transported to the scene of the search by military airlift, commercial or ERDA aircraft, or vehicle.

Countering nuclear threats requires teamwork by federal, state and local agencies. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has overall jurisdiction at the federal level, and is responsible for the legal aspects of any counterthreat actions taken. The Department of Defense is responsible for explosive ordnance disposal. ERDA provides technical personnel and equipment to assist in locating and neutralizing radioactive material or devices.

In addition, ERDA can provide technical personnel and equipment to respond to accidents involving radiological materials or otherwise through standing radiological assistance teams or accident response groups.

ERDA personnel and equipment are prepared to:

1. Evaluate the technical credibility of the threat;
2. Search for the radioactive material;
3. Identify the isotope and quantity of radioactive material;
4. Assess the probability of nuclear yield or spread of radioactive material;
5. Assess the potential for personnel injury and property damage in the event of activation of the device; and
6. Assist in the render-safe operation.

ERDA and its Los Alamos (New Mexico) Scientific Laboratory (LASL); Lawrence Livermore (California) Laboratory (LLL); Sandia Laboratories (SL) in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Livermore, California; and an industrial contractor, EG&G, of Boston, Massachusetts, are conducting continuing research and study projects to improve search capabilities.

The threats to which NEST is prepared to respond may involve lost or stolen radioactive material, improvised nuclear devices, or improvised radioactivity dispersal devices.

If a nuclear threat is made or there is any reason to suspect that either nuclear explosives or devices to scatter radioactive materials are involved, the FBI should be notified immediately. The FBI, ERDA, and DOD are co-operating in a rapid response capability to counter a variety of potential nuclear threats.