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## NUCLEAR SAFETY

### **Enviros target White House weapons policy**

**Ben Geman, *Greenwire* reporter**

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A new report from a leading environmental group charges that the Bush administration's nuclear weapons programs are diverting important resources from counterterrorism efforts and endangering national security.

The report from the Natural Resources Defense Council comes as the House and Senate appear at odds over funding levels for controversial White House-backed nuclear programs such as the "bunker buster" and research into systems such as low-yield nuclear weapons.

Yesterday, NRDC released "Nuclear Insecurity: A Critique of the Bush Administration's Nuclear Weapons Policies," which attacks the administration's missile defense plans, tactical weapons research, and a security posture that allows a "broadening" of potential targets to include non-nuclear states.

"While the ostensible goal of the new policy is increased deterrence against potential adversaries armed with chemical and biological weapons, this is achieved at the cost of weakening the taboo that has prevented the use of nuclear weapons since World War II," the report states.

The report argues that administration research into weapons development is undercutting national nonproliferation efforts by providing "political or moral cover for other states to retain, improve, or expand their nuclear arsenals." To remedy the situation, NRDC calls for scuttling programs such as the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator program and the Advanced Concepts Initiative that could involve research into low-yield weapons.

The report also calls for cancellation of Energy Department programs that help countries develop nuclear reactors for electricity because such efforts could lead to development of "weapons-useable" materials obtainable by terrorists. Finally, NRDC says the United States should cut its nuclear arsenal far more deeply than what is called for in reduction plans announced by the Bush administration in June.

One analyst, however, attacked the findings, alleging several of the programs

targeted by NRDC are needed to ensure the United States can deter potentially hostile states and a suite of possible threats including ballistic missiles and conflicts with nations with other weapons of mass destruction capacity.

Jack Spencer, a nuclear security analyst with the conservative Heritage Foundation, called missile defense necessary means to counter ballistic missile threats and provide a disincentive for states like North Korea from pursuing nuclear weapons programs. "Given the realities of missile proliferation and terrorism, the federal government needs to address both," Spencer said.

Spencer also said research into technologies such as bunker busters and low-yield nuclear weapons is essential because the existing arsenal is designed to address Cold War-type threats, while today's potential conflicts call for "useable" weapons such as those that can target underground military installations.

"Useability is important when you are talking about nukes," said Spencer, a Heritage senior policy analyst for defense and national security. "If it is not useable, the deterrence is not credible."

Some of the programs targeted by the NRDC report are likely to become controversial when House and Senate negotiators eventually try and reconcile the House Energy and Water appropriations bill, which has passed the House, and the Senate version, which has yet to be introduced.

The House version of the bill includes no funding for White House-backed programs such as bunker buster research, ACI, or plans to manufacture "pits," or the fissionable warhead core, in order to maintain current weapons or create new ones. But the Senate bill, when it emerges, is likely to include at least some funding for these programs, according to sources tracking the issue.

Top administration officials criticized the House funding decisions in a letter this month to key lawmakers, alleging the House bill will erode the effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in a Sept. 8 letter to House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.), state that if the funding is not provided, it would "eliminate or severely restrict key programs and initiatives necessary to support the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile and restore long-needed responsive nuclear weapons infrastructure."

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