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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

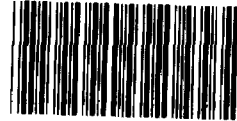
RESOURCES, COMMUNITY,
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION

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B-217647

APRIL 22, 1985

The Honorable Timothy E. Wirth
House of Representatives



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Dear Mr. Wirth:

Subject: Security Concerns at DOE's Rocky Flats Nuclear
Weapons Production Facility (GAO/RCED-85-83)

On May 9, 1984, you asked us to inquire into a number of security concerns raised by union members at the Department of Energy's (DOE) Rocky Flats nuclear weapons production facility. We discussed the union's concerns with DOE's manager for the Rocky Flats Area Office and with the Director of Plant Security for Rockwell International, the contractor operating Rocky Flats for DOE. We also discussed these concerns with other Rockwell employees and with other DOE officials in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs and in the Rocky Flats Area Office. In addition, we reviewed applicable DOE and Rockwell regulations and procedures and, where corrective actions were reported, verified that such actions had been taken.

We briefed you on the results of our work related to those security concerns on September 12, 1984. At that time you asked us to prepare this letter summarizing the information we provided at the briefing. As we pointed out during the briefing, representatives of the United Steelworkers of America Local 8031, the union representing most facility employees, brought four specific security allegations to our attention. The allegations were:

- A machine gun, attached to a pickup truck, misfired during a training exercise on May 24, 1984, resulting in shell fragments ricocheting in the back of the truck, injuring two security guards.
- On July 20, 1984, a security guard's handgun was discharged inside one of the facility's guard towers.

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--Rifles have been shoved into facility employees' stomachs during security exercises.

--A machine gun, attached to an armored personnel carrier, has been pointed at street level during routine security patrols, endangering facility employees.

In addition to the four specific allegations mentioned, union representatives said that military personnel could provide better security at Rocky Flats than security forces employed by Rockwell International. They also said that they did not understand increases in security that have been taking place since 1978.

Regarding the misfired machine gun, a Rockwell official informed us that this occurred at a remote firing range and that while two security guards were injured by ricocheting bullet fragments, Rocky Flats employees, other than members of the guard force, were not endangered. Subsequently, the bed of the pickup truck involved in the incident and a similar truck were lined with plywood on May 30, 1984, to absorb ricocheting bullet fragments. In addition, training procedures were implemented on May 30, 1984, which allow only two security guards to be in the vicinity of the machine gun while it is in use on the firing range.

Rockwell officials explained that the circumstances related to the second allegation--a handgun being discharged inside a guard tower--were strictly against Rockwell regulations. They told us that the guard involved in the incident--who was working on the handle of his handgun--was reprimanded and suspended without pay. These officials also noted that no other facility employees were endangered by the incident other than members of the guard force in and around the vicinity of the guard tower. We reviewed Rockwell's regulations and the guard's personnel file and verified that Rockwell's regulations prohibit guards from tampering with, or making repairs to any weapon and that the guard involved in the incident was sent a letter of reprimand and was suspended for 2 days without pay.

Regarding the third allegation--rifles shoved into employees' stomachs during security exercises--we were not able to confirm with Rockwell officials that such an event actually occurred. A Rockwell official did acknowledge that weapons may have been inadvertently pointed at employees during security exercises. He explained that regular, periodic security exercises are required by DOE to maintain the guard force's level of proficiency, and that during security exercises, M-16 rifles, automatic machine guns, and shotguns are used to simulate--as close as possible--actual attack conditions. He further explained that, to minimize any safety impacts, facility employees are told of the exercise

prior to its beginning and are instructed to stay inside (and if possible, sit down) until the exercise has been completed. In addition, we noted Rockwell's regulations require that the rifles and machine guns used in the exercise be unloaded with the magazine out of the weapon. Shotguns used in the exercises do have five shells in the magazine; however, Rockwell regulations provide that no shell may be entered into the weapon's firing chamber and that the weapon's safety must be on.

Since our initial discussions with Rockwell officials, Rockwell management issued a memorandum dated October 26, 1984, to all security shift officers to reemphasize these procedures. The memorandum restated that all rifles and machine guns are to be unloaded and the magazines are to be carried in the security guards' pockets, and that shotguns used in security exercises may not have a shell in the firing chamber. The memorandum also specified that all weapons must be carried in a safe manner and should not be pointed at employees.

The fourth allegation involved machine guns on armored personnel carriers being aimed at street level during routine security patrols. The Director of Security for Rockwell told us that on January 13, 1984, Rockwell amended its regulations to require machine guns to be mechanically secured so that the barrels point upwards when not in use, but can be released quickly when required. We verified that metal pins had been installed to hold the weapons with the barrels pointing up. During our October 26, 1984, inspection, however, we found that on one machine gun the metal pin would not lock the gun in a barrel-up position. Rockwell security management removed the personnel carrier and machine gun from service and corrected the problem.

With regard to the union representatives' preference for military personnel instead of the security guards employed by Rockwell, DOE officials consider the Rocky Flats guard force to be, overall, a well-trained force qualified to perform its security functions. DOE officials told us that many of the facility's guards are military veterans, and members of the Rocky Flats guard force receive extensive weapons and SWAT team training. The guards also receive specialized training, such as how to handle security during a fire involving radioactive materials. In addition, during the summer of 1984, the guard force at Rocky Flats received a commendation based on a DOE inspection, which cited the program for being exemplary and ". . . one of the best within the Department of Energy." DOE officials said that security at the Rocky Flats facility is better served by a non-military guard force.

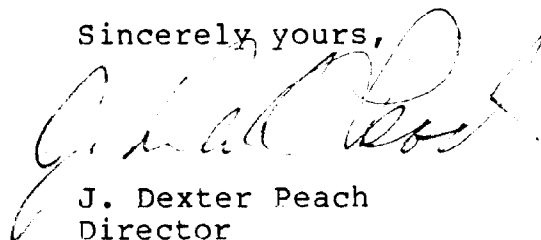
Finally, concerns such as those expressed by employees over the increased level of security that has been implemented since 1978 at the Rocky Flats facility indicate greater cooperation between management and employees might be achieved through improved communications. In this regard, DOE officials acknowledged that better communications can help minimize the number of misunderstandings that have occurred between management and employees concerning security at the facility. To more fully inform and educate facility employees, Rockwell developed, in May 1984, a video tape which addresses the need for increased security at Rocky Flats. The Director of Plant Security told us that as of January 1985, the tape had been shown to about 60 percent of the facility's employees and will be shown to the remaining facility employees in the near future. An open question remains, however, as to the extent this effort will alleviate employees' concerns. The video tape itself was unclassified and, according to DOE officials, the perceived continuing terrorist threat to the facility--which the security system at Rocky Flats is designed to meet--cannot be fully explained to most employees due to its classified nature.

At the request of your office, we did not obtain written agency comments on this report; however, we discussed the information contained in the report with DOE program officials. These officials were in agreement with the information presented. Our audit work was primarily carried out during August and September 1984 and updated in January 1985. We performed our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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As agreed during the September 12, 1984, briefing, we are not planning any further work at this time concerning security at Rocky Flats. Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 7 days from its publication date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Energy and make copies available to others on request.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Dexter Peach".

J. Dexter Peach
Director