

# memorandum

DATE: JAN 25 1995  
 REPLY TO ATTN OF: DP-23 (Hagerty/3-3558)  
 SUBJECT: NUCLEAR EMERGENCY SEARCH TEAM

TO: Manager, Nevada Operations Office

One of the critical missions of the Department of Energy (DOE) is to provide timely and effective technical response to major radiological emergencies. An element of this program is the operational/technical support that the Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST) provides in our efforts to support the United States Government's (USG) policy and commitment to combatting terrorism. Because of this vitally important role of our organization and DOE/Nevada Operations Office (NV) responsibility to carry out the operation of this national asset, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the commitment we have made to the USG is satisfied.

Over the past several weeks, I have directed my staff to review the overall status of the readiness capabilities of NEST, focusing specifically on the recent full field exercise series, Mile Shakedown. The initial indications of this review are not promising, having indications that our overall stated capabilities are not as refined as they are required to be. Alleged shortcomings in the program focus on time lines, deployment logistics, and overall integration of resources within DOE and the interagency community. I also have concerns about the integrity of the exercises we have conducted.

As I am certain you appreciate the gravity of this potential problem, I am requesting that you conduct a general assessment of NEST with respect to the aforementioned concerns. It is vital that our technical response to nuclear terrorism manifests the full expertise of the DOE community. Priority must be given to effective utilization of the unique technical capabilities which reside within the DOE nuclear weapons program, the cornerstone of DOE's technical response.

In general terms, the assessment should include an analysis of:

- DOE/NV assessment of the strong and weak points of the NEST program;
- DOE/NV plan to address the weaknesses and maintain the strengths, including milestones; and
- A statement of the current NEST capability that can be advertised with accuracy and integrity today and a statement of projected target capability and operational date.

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**REVIEWING OFFICIAL:**

Reviewing Official: Paul Laplante, NV521 (NAME)  
 (Name/Title) Team leader  
 Date: March 8, 1996 23 Jan 95

In the area of exercise review, it has come to my attention that NEST exercises have been allegedly conducted in a manner to "stack the deck" in favor of unrealistic success. Some of the particular areas of concern include:

- The amount of time required in a real evolution will be less than allocated in the exercise, requiring expedited procedures and not consistent with actual practices;
- Rapid decisionmaking and action is inhibited by the huge NEST structure;
- Some information was inappropriately leaked to the players during Mirage Gold and the June Emergency Deployment Readiness Evaluation. Specifics include device location, type of source, attempts to provide out-of-exercise radiographs, and premature recall notification;
- Erroneous information/data were given to disablement teams;
- The disablement procedure for the device was not appropriate, and lessons learned from the Mini-Jigsaw conducted in the summer have not resulted in improvements. In fact, it is noted that, in general, the NEST community has neglected to incorporate shortcomings which were brought out at past exercises into the program; and
- Pre-deployment of communications capabilities created optimistic and unrealistic results, which allowed attempts by the Advance Party to deploy prestaged equipment before it could have realistically arrived;
- Airlift resource expectations are unreasonable and appear to be extremely out-of-date;
- Safety considerations of the Search Team in a hostile environment need considerable improvement and thoughtful consideration;
- Interactions with and communications between our other emergency response assets and Federal agencies require improvement.

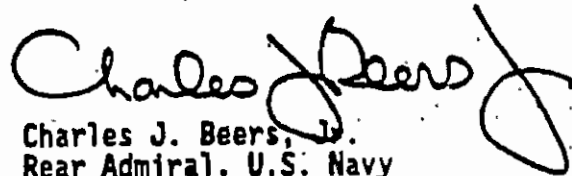
While my staff's initial review of only a fraction of documents proved disconcerting, I am requesting that your assessment not be limited only to these issues; you are encouraged to address other issues of concern you uncover.

Since the information that led me to issue this request was provided by DOE/NV, I am sure that you have also noticed similar comments in the Mirage Gold after action reports. While it is certainly expected that some exercise artificialities are unavoidable, it is clear to me that there are some serious concerns about NEST capability. It should also be noted that I recognize the hard work and dedication by the NEST community, who consistently display great technical skill in pursuit of their duties. It is, therefore, our responsibility to ensure that the system is fixed, making it possible for those efforts and talents of our nuclear weapon program personnel to be utilized as effectively as possible.

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It is quite possible that we have allowed a management regime to be established that does not serve the NEST program as well as it should. It is incumbent upon our program to review the NEST program to insure its continuing capability. Perceptions of poor integration of assets, improper flow of information to players during exercises, and implications that an unrealistic time line has been advertised are not issues that can be solved by budget reallocations, but reflect on leadership and management of the program.

Upon completion of your review, I would like a briefing of the results. Given the seriousness of these concerns, I expect that the assessment should be completed and briefed as soon as possible. I look forward to working with you to resolve any problems identified by your assessment.



Charles J. Beers, Jr.  
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