

CIA: Water facilities are potential terrorist targets

WASHINGTON —The threat from terrorists using a weapon of mass destruction has increased, says a new report from the CIA that claims extremist groups appear most interested in chemicals like cyanide salts to contaminate food and water supplies.

The agency released the report yesterday, 30 January, Reuters news service reported.

Since the 11 September terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, extremist groups appear to be increasing their search for weapons that could destroy large populations using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents, according to an unclassified CIA report to Congress, the news service said.

The semiannual report on the acquisition of technology relating to weapons of mass destruction contained a special section dealing with the post-11 September threat, the news service said. It stated the threat of terrorists using chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials appears to be rising.

The report was issued separate from President Bush's State of the Union Address on Tuesday. In that address, Bush highlighted the dangers posed by the terrorist network. He said diagrams had been found of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world.

The discoveries prompted an FBI warning to law enforcement agencies earlier this month. Similar warnings have been given on a regular basis to water facilities since 11 September.

The CIA report said several of the 30 foreign organizations the United States has designated as terrorists have expressed interest in weapons of mass destruction, although terrorists would probably continue to favor conventional tactics such as bombings and shootings, according to Reuters.

The report said there was no evidence terrorist had nuclear capability and that the extremist groups appeared most interested in chemicals that could do widespread damage to food or water supplies, Reuters reported.

Terrorist groups also have expressed interest in other toxic industrial chemicals and traditional chemical agents, including chlorine and phosgene, the report said, according to the news service.

Since 11 September, water-related agencies and organizations have held meetings and seminars on water security and the US Environmental Protection agency is working with water and wastewater facilities to help them assess vulnerability, then develop the best ways to make the facilities more secure.