



COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**  
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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## **Statement from Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-Va.)**

*NIST's Physical Security Vulnerabilities: A GAO Undercover Review*

**Chairwoman Comstock:** This Committee has a record of strong, bipartisan support for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). A non-regulatory agency within the Department of Commerce, NIST promotes U.S. innovation and competitiveness by advancing measurement science, standards, and technology.

NIST plays a very important role when it comes to constantly evolving cyber threats and technology by providing guidelines and standards to help reduce cyber risks to federal agencies and critical infrastructure. It is timely to note that October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

Our subcommittee hears from NIST witnesses regularly on subjects like cybersecurity and boosting innovation and international competitiveness among American manufacturers.

Today, however, we will be discussing a handful of dangerous physical security breaches at NIST's two campuses in Gaithersburg, Maryland and Boulder, Colorado. This is not the first hearing we have held on this subject, but we all hope that it is the last.

Lack of security at NIST facilities is a direct, serious threat to the safety and well-being of thousands of federal workers, a steady stream of scientists and technologists who visit NIST facilities every day, and sizable populations of people who live and work near the NIST facilities.

NIST's campus security has been a growing concern of this Committee since the July 2015 explosion at NIST's Gaithersburg facility which revealed a NIST police officer – a former acting chief of NIST police – was operating an illegal meth lab at a NIST building. This event was the catalyst for bringing to light other security issues at the Gaithersburg campus.

Not quite one year later, in April 2016, another, no less serious incident occurred at the NIST facilities in Boulder, Colorado. A man without identification walked onto the NIST campus and was able to enter a building and laboratory where hazardous chemicals were stored.

Luckily, this man wasn't intent on playing around with laboratory chemicals and equipment or causing other damage. He instead roamed about the building and made himself at home.

Luckily, the meth lab at the NIST Gaithersburg campus exploded on a weekend evening, when NIST staff and visitors weren't around.

But luck always runs out.

We are going to hear this morning from NIST and Department of Commerce witnesses who will describe steps that were taken to shore up physical security after these two incidents.

We are also going to hear about the results of a GAO investigation conducted at our Committee's request, which reveals that there are still serious, unaddressed security problems at NIST's Maryland and Colorado facilities.

What we are going to hear today from GAO is serious, serious enough that the Department may not allow certain details to be included in the public record.

NIST must learn from its past and do its best to ensure proper security is implemented. This is critical for the safety of NIST campuses, its employees, visitors, and the surrounding communities.

It is also important not to jeopardize NIST's mission to promote U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness, which enhances economic security and improves quality of life.

Physical insecurity at NIST's two locations obviously jeopardizes the important work done by the agency. Even more important, what seems to be huge, unfixed holes in security at NIST facilities threatens the safety and well-being of approximately 3,000 NIST employees; 3,500 visiting professionals from industry, academia, and other government agencies; and hundreds of thousands of residents of nearby communities.

The safety of our people should be the number-one concern. Safety is certainly the number-one concern for this Committee.

I hope and trust that today's hearing marks the end of temporizing and halfway measures and the beginning of swift, uncompromising action by NIST and the Department of Commerce.

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