

Biden Introduces Legislation to Protect Americans from Attacks on Water Treatment Facilities

WASHINGTON, DC –U.S. Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE), joined by Senator Jeffords (I-VT) and Senator Boxer (D-CA), today introduced legislation that will significantly reduce the threat of an attack on our nation's drinking and waste water treatment facilities. According to Senator Biden, these facilities are located in urban areas across the nation, and, because many of them store large amounts of toxic chemicals, they represent a significant threat to the local populations if targeted by terrorists.

In introducing the legislation, Biden cited a report by President Bush's Homeland Security Council, indicating that a simple explosive placed beside a chlorine gas tank in a high-density area could cause 17,500 fatalities, 10,000 severe injuries, and 100,000 hospitalizations. Currently, there are about 100 facilities that store sufficient quantities of chlorine and other toxic chemicals to threaten between 100,000 and 1,000,000 citizens.

Senator Biden's bill would provide grants to treatment facilities allowing them to convert from chlorine to safer alternatives that are in common usage within the industry, such as Sodium Hypochlorite (bleach) or ultra-violet light. "This simple measure would have the immediate benefit of completely eliminating a known threat to nearly 50 million Americans, and it would also eliminate the single biggest reason for chlorine rail shipments through our communities.

Biden cited a success story in his home town of Wilmington, Delaware. After 9-11, the Wilmington Wastewater Treatment Facility, which once held up to 40-tons of chlorine at any given time, switched to liquid bleach. "The facility has retained its capacity to effectively treat Wilmington's wastewater while completely eliminating a significant risk of death or injury to more than a 500,000 residents within a 13 mile radius of the plant," said Biden.

"It is absolutely unacceptable that, almost five years after 9/11, a threat this grave still exists, especially when it's a threat we can easily address," said Biden. "Plain and simple, this legislation will protect over 40 million Americans immediately, and protect all Americans from attacks on toxic chemicals at our water facilities within five years.

"These huge amounts of chlorine, stored in city centers and shipped across the country on our rails, represent a ticking time bomb. The 9-11 Commission recently found that the U.S. Government has failed to set priorities and has completely neglected our nation's critical infrastructure. Now is the time to address the threat to our nation's water facilities, before even one American falls victim to our failure to act."

Biden's legislation, which would cost roughly \$125 million per year over five years, would require the EPA and the Department of Homeland Security to prioritize these facilities on the basis of risk and distribute grants to offset the expenses of conversion. Facilities that converted from chlorine to safer alternatives for security reasons after 9/11 but prior to enactment of this legislation would be allowed to participate in the grant program because we want to promote proactive decisions that increase homeland security at the local level, and we don't want to provide an incentive for facilities to continue to wait."

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