

THE REAL TERRORISTS

I've started reading through ~~J. Edgar Hoover's~~ files the reports a contractor developed for PA's Department of Homeland Security that describe political activism as a terrorist threat; Governor Rendell has made them publicly available here. I'll have more to say about them later (though feel free to add comments on them below).

But for the moment, I'd like to unpack the underlying premise.

The whole idea behind collecting this information and sharing it with private sector entities like oil drilling lobbyists arose as part of efforts to protect our critical infrastructure from terrorist attack after 9/11. US DHS describes the imperative to protect critical infrastructure and key resources (CIKR) this way:

Why is CIKR Protection Important?

- *Attacks on CIKR could significantly disrupt the functioning of government and business alike and produce cascading effects far beyond the targeted sector and physical location of the incident.*
- *Direct terrorist attacks and natural, manmade, or technological hazards*

could produce catastrophic losses in terms of human casualties, property destruction, and economic effects, as well as profound damage to public morale and confidence.

- *Attacks using components of the nation's CIKR as weapons of mass destruction could have even more devastating physical and psychological consequences.*

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 provides the primary authority for the overall homeland security mission. This act charged the Department of Homeland Security with primary responsibility for developing a comprehensive national plan to secure CIKR and recommend "the measures necessary to protect the key resources and critical infrastructure of the United States." This comprehensive plan is the **National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP)**, published by the Department in June 2006. The NIPP provides the unifying structure for integrating a wide range of efforts for the protection of CIKR into a single national program.

And here's what the federal government's Department of Homeland Security considers critical infrastructure, which is how the ITRR organized the reports it gave to PA's DHS:

- Agriculture and Food
- Banking and Finance
- Chemical
- Commercial Facilities
- Communications
- Critical Manufacturing
- Dams
- Defense Industrial Base
- Emergency Services
- Energy
- Government Facilities
- Healthcare and Public Health
- Information Technology
- National Monuments and Icons
- Nuclear Reactors, Waste, and Materials
- Postal and Shipping
- Transportation Systems
- Water

So you see, because “attacks on CIKR could significantly disrupt the functioning of government and business alike and produce cascading effects far beyond the targeted sector and physical location of the incident,” PA (and surely other states) are collecting information about the lawful political organizing of anti-drilling and animal welfare activists, among others.

What I want to know is why we regard terrorist attacks to be the greatest threat to our transportation system? To our water? To our food system?

And most of all, to our banking and finance system?

Just to take one example, who do you think is a greater risk to our oil and gas infrastructure? A bunch of hippie protesters trying to limit drilling in the Marcellus Shale and thereby protect the quality of their drinking water

(which is, itself, considered critical infrastructure)? Or PG&E, which sat on knowledge of an extremely high risk pipeline for three years even after setting aside the money to fix it?

Three years ago, PG&E asked state regulators for permission to spend \$4.87 million to replace a section of the pipeline associated with the pipe that exploded in San Bruno last Thursday. The 1.42-mile section that ran under South San Francisco, which is more heavily populated than San Bruno, was considered extremely high risk and in need to replacement. Last year, the utility company made a similar request to replace a larger section of the same pipeline, at a cost of \$13 million. Rate increases were approved and the plan should have gone forward. Sadly, nothing was done and lives were lost.

The South San Francisco pipeline replacement project was dropped down on the priority list and the money allocated for the work was spent elsewhere. Many experts and laypersons alike are now asking, why didn't PG&E replace pipes they knew to be extremely dangerous?

And while multiple layers of government make sure the PG&Es of the world know about those hippie protesters, they can't be bothered to require the utilities or pipeline operators to actually return the favor by revealing where the pipelines at risk of explosion are.

In a letter sent Friday, the executive director of the California Public Utilities Commission, Paul Clanon, sought the location of each pipeline segment on the list as well as a "detailed description of the criteria PG&E uses in deciding which pipeline segments to characterize as high-

priority projects.”

Clanon defended the delay in seeking the list, whose existence PG&E disclosed as early as 2007, saying the agency didn’t see the need for the information before. Just because a site is on the list doesn’t necessarily mean it is dangerous, he said, adding that it’s not his agency’s role “to run the day-by-day activities of the utility.”

Leave aside our wholesale neglect of these elements of critical infrastructure themselves—the crumbling of our pipelines and roads and financial system because neither the public nor the private sector want to spend the money and time to keep them together—and focus on the information gathering part of it.

Because terrorism is somehow a greater threat to our country than PG&E’s neglect or Wright County Egg’s negligence or Lehman’s greed, we collect and share information on hippies. But not on the pipelines that will explode of their own accord, with action from neither hippies nor terrorists.

Updated to fix typo, “Communities” instead of “Communications.”