

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
*“Protecting the Electric Grid from the Potential Threats of Solar Storms and
Electromagnetic Pulse”*

July 22, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Threats to the homeland have evolved considerably over the past 15 years. In the months after 9/11, the most pressing threat to the homeland came from Al-Qaeda terrorists planning attacks from remote caves in Afghanistan. Today, the terror threat has become far more diverse.

Some terror groups are still seeking sophisticated attacks against high profile targets. Other groups, such as ISIS, are attempting to inspire extremists all over the world – including here in the United States – to carry out simple attacks within their own communities.

We are also being attacked daily in cyberspace. In many ways, we are dealing with an epidemic of online theft and fraud. This epidemic is growing at an alarming rate, as attacks become more sophisticated and disruptive.

And the challenges we faced with the recent global Ebola outbreak and our ongoing efforts to counter the spread of avian influenza remind us that threats to the homeland aren't just man-made. To address these evolving threats, we must always look to stay at least one step ahead of the bad guys, or in some cases, Mother Nature.

At the same time, we have to reluctantly accept the reality that our nation cannot protect against every threat, or potential threat, out there. Though we should always strive for perfection, we simply do not have the resources to achieve 100 percent security all of the time. That is why it is so critical that we prioritize our homeland defenses. We must focus on those threats that our experience and intelligence tell us are most likely to occur, and would have the gravest impact if, God forbid, they became a reality.

Today's hearing gives us an opportunity to assess two different potential threats to our electrical grid—man-made electromagnetic pulses, or 'EMPs,' and geomagnetic disturbances caused by space weather.

Each of these threats poses some degree of risk to our communities – that much is clear. Our job, however, is to assess that risk and figure out where these threats rank in the spectrum of everything else our country faces. For example, we must determine how likely electro and geomagnetic threats are to occur given our existing preparations and deterrents. And if they were to occur, how they could impact the homeland?

Answers to these basic questions become all the more important and urgent amid the horrific reminders of the existing challenges we face from domestic terrorism and homegrown violent extremism in our own communities —attacks like those that occurred recently in Chattanooga and Charleston.

I hope today we can make some progress on this front, and that our witnesses can provide us with a clear-eyed assessment of these threats. I look forward to an informative hearing.

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