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# United States Senate

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June 17, 2008

Dr. James M. Turner  
Acting Director, National Institute of Standards and Technology  
100 Bureau Drive, Stop 1000  
Gaithersburg, MD 20899-1000

Dear Dr. Turner,

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) provides the United States with unparalleled measurement science and standards development expertise. Its world-class research efforts have yielded three Nobel prizes. The facilities in Boulder are a treasure, and I am honored to represent the staff working there.

The recent radioactive spill of a small amount of plutonium at NIST Boulder, in which 22 individuals were contaminated, raises concerns about the safety programs and radioactivity accountability precautions in place at the NIST laboratories.

Clearly, some scientific research demands the use of radioactive materials. However, the use of these or other hazardous materials and equipment requires a heightened level of responsibility and control. To that end, I request you provide me with the periodicity in place at NIST Boulder, and the federal requirements for the following:

- 1) radioactive source inventories,
- 2) radioactivity surveys,
- 3) radioactive spill decontamination training drills,
- 4) fire drills in spaces containing radioactive materials, and
- 5) employee safety training, including training on the use and handling of radioactive materials, hazardous materials, and potentially dangerous laboratory equipment.

Please also provide the precautions being taken to ensure radioactive source security.

The safety of NIST employees is the laboratory's highest priority and I recognize that historically NIST has maintained an excellent record in this regard. I am certain we agree that a stringent, documented level of safety education and procedures, including radioactivity surveys and decontamination drills, is in the best interest of the laboratories and the staff. I encourage your offices to thoroughly review the NIST safety programs, including the introduction of a safety stand-down training day.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. John Plumb in my office at [john\\_plumb@salazar.senate.gov](mailto:john_plumb@salazar.senate.gov) or by phone at 202-224-5852. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

  
Ken Salazar  
United States Senate