Study: Port-operator lapses could allow terrorist attack

By Ted Bridis
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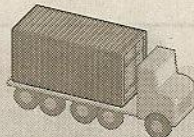## Cargo container shipments vulnerable when crossing seas

A study by the Department of Homeland Security, obtained by the Associated Press revealed that cargo containers can be opened, allowing weapons of mass destruction or other materials to be added
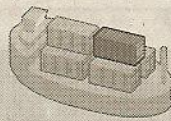

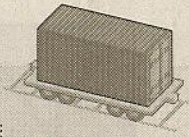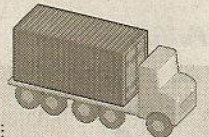| Wheat factory Barby, Germany	Truck to port Bremerhaven, Germany	Ocean crossing to Oakland, Calif.	Train from Oakland, Calif. to Seattle	Truck to distribution center, Kent, Wash.
▶ Containers were not inspected prior to wheat loading ▶ Loading was not supervised and access control to the wheat plant was not adequate	▶ Containers were in the driver's possession for 72 hours without supervision ▶ Containers could have been tampered with by removing the doors of the truck or placing a device underneath the container	▶ Cargo was unattended in the vessel's hold for 28 days ▶ Opportunities to tamper with the containers existed, although access was limited due to the design of the ship	▶ Rail transit took approximately five days with two stops to switch operations ▶ Crew changes, traffic control and other operations resulted in more stops in areas with limited security	▶ Container was transported by rail on a cart that did not cover the sides of the container ▶ No inspectors in place to prevent the driver from placing unmanifested material into the container

AP

WASHINGTON — Lapses by private port operators, shipping lines or truck drivers could allow terrorists to smuggle weapons of mass destruction into the United States, according to a government review of security at American seaports.

The $75 million, three-year study by the Homeland Security Department included inspections at a New Jersey cargo terminal involved in the dispute over a Dubai company's now-abandoned bid to take over significant operations at six major U.S. ports.

The previously undisclosed results from the study found that cargo containers can be opened secretly during shipment to add or remove items without alerting U.S. authorities, according to government documents marked "sensitive security information" and obtained by The Associated Press.

The study found serious lapses by private companies at foreign and American ports, aboard ships and on trucks and trains "that would enable unmanifested materials or weapons of mass destruction to be introduced into the supply chain."

The study, expected to be completed this fall, used satellites and experimental monitors to trace roughly 20,000 cargo containers out of the millions arriving each year from Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Most containers are sealed with mechanical bolts that can be cut and replaced or have doors that can be removed by dismantling hinges.

The risks from smuggled weapons are especially worrisome because U.S. authorities largely decide which cargo containers to inspect based on shipping records of what is thought to be inside.

Among the study's findings:
■ Safety problems were not limited to overseas ports. A warehouse in Maine was graded less secure than any in Pakistan, Turkey or Brazil. "There is a perception that U.S. facilities benefit from superior security-protection measures," the study said. "This mind set may contribute to a misplaced sense of confidence in American business practices."

■ No records were kept of "cursory" inspections in Guatemala for containers filled with Starbucks Corp. coffee beans shipped to the West Coast. "Coffee beans were accessible to anyone entering the facility," the study said. It found significant mistakes on manifests and other paperwork. In a statement to the AP, Starbucks said it was reviewing its security procedures.

■ Truck drivers in Brazil were permitted to take cargo containers home overnight and park along public streets. Trains in the U.S. stopped in rail yards that did not have fences and were in high-crime areas. A shipping-industry adage reflects unease over such practices: "A container at rest is a container at risk."

■ Practices at Turkey's Port of Izmir were "totally inadequate by U.S. standards." But, the study noted, "It has been done that way for decades in Turkey."

■ Containers could be opened aboard some ships during weekslong voyages to America. "Due to the time involved in transit (and) the fact that most vessel crew members are foreigners with limited credentialing and vetting, the containers are vulnerable to intrusion during the ocean voyage," the study said.

■ Some governments will not help tighten security because they view terrorism as an American problem. The United States said "certain countries," which were not identified, would not cooperate in its security study — "a tangible example of the lack of urgency with which these issues are regarded."

Sen. Patty Murray, who advocated the study, said: "There are huge holes in our security system that need to be filled." The Washington Democrat said the study "shows us there are major vulnerabilities over who handles cargo, where it's been and whether cargo is on a manifest."

Part of the study tested new tamper-evident locks on containers and tracking devices.

"It's important to figure out what works and what doesn't," said Elaine Dezenski, Homeland Security's acting assistant secretary for policy development. She said the study "gave us a much better view of vulnerabilities." The United States is looking for weaknesses across the shipping system to learn where terrorists might strike, she said.

The study, called "Operation Safe Commerce," undercuts arguments that port security in America is an exclusive province of the Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection and is not managed by companies operating shipping terminals.