

WHAT'S BREWIN': Bob Brewin's Take on Defense Information Technology

Bio-Labs Cyber Threats Ignored?

BY BOB BREWIN 05/27/09 06:34 pm ET

Laboratories that conduct research on dangerous biological agents such as anthrax have not paid much attention to the potential of cyber threats or cyber intrusions, the Defense Science Board [said in a report](#) released this week.

The board visited the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute; Fort Detrick, Md.; the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington; the National Naval Medical Research Center in Bethesda, Md.; Edgewood Chemical Biological Center in Edgewood, Md.; and labs operated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Georgia State University.

Based on the visits, as well as briefings from another six Defense labs, two additional federal laboratories, three industry labs and two other academic labs, the Defense Science Board determined, "None of the labs appears to have adequately considered the cyber threat."

Some of the labs indicated they believed their critical computer systems were isolated enough to prevent intrusions that would allow an attacker, for example, to gain control of control systems that provide access to sensitive parts of the labs.

But the board did not believe any of the computer systems should be considered isolated. In fact, the report said at least two of the non-Defense labs had either wireless or wired remote access to their control systems.

The National Security Agency or another qualified agency should conduct reviews of the computer systems at Fort Detrick and other Defense labs to determine whether there are indeed wireless connections to the supposedly isolated computer systems, the Defense Science Board recommended.

The stakes are high, the report said:

A determined adversary cannot be prevented from obtaining very dangerous materials intended for nefarious purposes, if not from DoD laboratories, then from other sources. The nation needs to recognize this reality and be prepared to mitigate the effects of a biological attack. Today, we as a nation are not prepared.

And, as we all know, it [already happened](#) with an insider spiriting away anthrax spores and mailing them to offices on Capitol Hill.

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