

## Why GAO Did This Study

Concerns have been raised that risk-significant sources could be stolen by terrorists and used to create a “dirty bomb.” NRC is responsible for licensing the possession and use of these sources. DOT regulates the transport of such sources, and DHS is responsible for securing all modes of transportation.

GAO was asked to review the security of these sources during ground transport. This report examines (1) the steps that NRC, DOT, and DHS have taken since September 11, 2001, to strengthen the security of these sources; and (2) the challenges that exist to further strengthening the security of these sources during ground transport and opportunities to address them.

GAO reviewed relevant laws and regulations, analyzed information on source shipments, and interviewed federal agency officials, officials from four motor carriers identified through interviews and research, and officials from two of the largest source manufacturers.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that NRC, in consultation with DOT and DHS, identify an approach to verify that carriers meet NRC requirements. NRC agreed with the recommendation. DOT agreed to consult with NRC and DHS, but did not fully concur, citing a lack of authority. GAO clarified the recommendation in response to DOT’s concern.

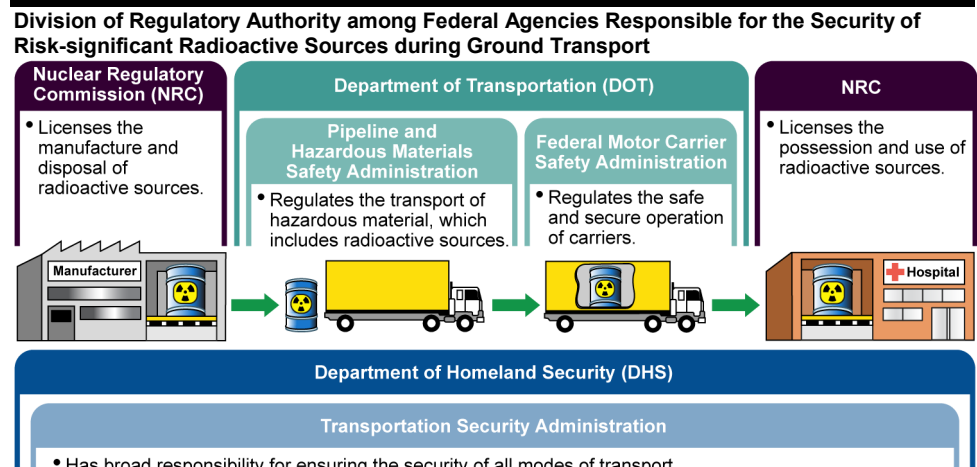
View [GAO-17-58](#). For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at (202) 512-3841 or [oakleys@gao.gov](mailto:oakleys@gao.gov).

# RADIOACTIVE SOURCES

## Opportunities Exist for Federal Agencies to Strengthen Transportation Security

### What GAO Found

Since September 11, 2001, the three federal agencies responsible for securing risk-significant radioactive sources (those considered most dangerous) during ground transport have taken steps to strengthen the security of these sources. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requires source licensees to ensure that motor carriers transporting these sources have security measures, such as 24-hour monitoring of shipments of potentially fatal sources. The Department of Transportation (DOT) updated its regulations to require security plans for these sources, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established security standards for commercial drivers’ licenses. The agencies’ participation in three collaborative mechanisms—a task force, memorandums of understanding (MOU), and coordinating councils—has also facilitated security improvements. The figure below illustrates how the agencies divide their responsibilities.



Sources: GAO analysis of NRC, DOT, and DHS regulations and documents. | GAO-17-58

NRC and DOT face challenges related to collecting data and ensuring compliance with NRC security requirements for ground transport of risk-significant radioactive sources, but opportunities exist to address them. For example, NRC does not directly inspect whether motor carriers contracted by licensees to transport risk-significant sources have implemented its security requirements because its regulatory authority extends only to its licensees. Instead, NRC requires licensees to ensure that carriers meet the requirements, and its inspectors are to verify that licensees do so. DOT and state officials have regulatory authority over carriers, but their inspectors do not enforce compliance with NRC security requirements because DOT does not have that authority. Thus, no federal or state agency directly inspects carriers for compliance with NRC’s security requirements. Under a 2015 MOU, the three agencies committed to coordinating on inspection activities to optimize available resources. By consulting with DOT and DHS to identify an approach to verify that carriers are meeting NRC’s security requirements, NRC has an opportunity to further strengthen the security of shipments of risk-significant sources, for example, by having DOT inspectors verify compliance during on-site investigations.