

Target-Rich Environment

South Philly residents face off with Homeland Security, Sunoco about potential terrorist threats.

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IT WAS AN ATTACK THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY never saw coming. On Dec. 6, the agency dispatched two protective security advisors — anti-terrorism specialists tasked with assisting local efforts to protect critical infrastructure — to South Philly to discuss security issues with members of the Sports Complex Special Services District (SCSSD) board of directors.

There, neighborhood leaders politely watched as local Homeland Security advisor William Ryan and his regional supervisor John Guest played an al-Qaida recruitment video seized from the battlefield in Afghanistan. Then came a PowerPoint presentation about the agency's work on a broad range of potential targets in southeastern Pennsylvania. They also learned how strategically placed concrete planters are protecting Philadelphia's cultural assets from the Liberty Bell to City Hall.

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But in the question-and-answer session that followed, neighborhood leaders ambushed the duo, demanding specifics as to what was being done to protect the potential terrorist targets bracketing their homes: the stadium complex on the east and the Sunoco refinery on the west.

They wouldn't get the answers they wanted.

Locals here worry that a terrorist attack on the Sunoco refinery — think intentional plane crash — would emit a plume of toxic hydrogen fluoride that would poison the air breathed by millions.

They also have concerns that Sunoco's early warning system is barely audible, that there is no evacuation plan in case of a hydrogen- fluoride-releasing attack and that neither advisor had been briefed on a Sunoco proposal to build a petroleum and hydrogen pipeline system through Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park near Interstate 95.

"We want to know what you're doing to protect our community, not City Hall," demanded Judy Cerrone, representing the old Veterans Stadium neighborhood east of Broad Street.



DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN?: Terrorism experts named the Sunoco refinery the region's top target. Neighbors are worried.

: Michael T. Regan

During a phone interview after the meeting Ryan, the son of a Philly cop and a former CIA agent, explained, "This is what we're here to do: partner with communities and businesses to help them understand how the critical infrastructure in their area fits into the total national-security picture and then how they can better protect it."

A nonprofit dedicated to improving the neighborhoods south of Oregon Avenue, the SCSSD primarily focuses on community beautification projects and alleviating traffic congestion; it waded into security concerns because of a Channel 6 *Action News* report that the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute identified the refinery as the region's top terrorist target. (The meeting was scheduled prior to that story.)

To press their case, the board voted unanimously to authorize SCSSD executive director Shawn Jalosinski to take their concerns straight to Sunoco, which told *City Paper* it welcomes the dialogue. While Jalosinski did not return calls for comment, Sunoco spokesman Gerald Davis said, "We work closely with local, state and federal agencies, especially the Department of Homeland Security, on the challenges of securing our facilities. We also continue to invest in our facilities to ensure the safety and security of our employees and the communities in which we operate."

Increasing communications between neighbors and Sunoco is always a good idea, said 184th District state Rep. William Keller, an ex-officio SCSSD board member. But from his perspective, the company has done right by the neighborhood by doing more than the government required to secure their facilities. Still, Keller says, "There's also only so much we can do if people are willing to kill themselves to wreak havoc in our communities."

So, securing Sunoco re-mains a top priority for the agency, and the department has conducted multiple assessments at Sunoco facilities. Both Ryan and Davis declined to comment on specific findings, though. "We're not a regulatory agency," Ryan said, "and we're not forcing ourselves through the door and our recommendations aren't requirements."

That lack of openness disturbs Cerrone and other concerned South Philly residents; they thought Homeland Security's involvement could make Sunoco more proactive, but for now, they say they are satisfied to work through the SCSSD to get answers.

In the end, Ryan and Guest vowed to bring the district, Sunoco and Homeland Security together.

"You can't put a company like Sunoco on the spot as individuals," Cerrone said. "Our voices will be louder as a group."

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