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## Canada

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### Ottawa airport testing dirty-bomb sensors

*CTV.ca News Staff*

As a potential precursor to their introduction at airports countrywide, the federal government is using Ottawa's international airport to test a new system designed to sense so-called "dirty bombs."

The \$4-million project is being overseen by the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Research & Technology Initiative (CRTI).

According to a statement on the federal agency's website, the project "will implement an operational radiological security system at the Ottawa International Airport which will provide a model transferable for the protection of other airports in the national aviation system."

By monitoring radiation levels in the air, the system detects whether airline passengers are carrying, or have been in recent contact with radioactive materials.

According to security analyst Alan Bell of Globe Risk Holdings Inc., the devices are aimed at stemming fears of a crude nuclear device exploding over the airport or a crowded city centre.

"It makes no difference," he told CTV's Canada AM, explaining the recipe for a so-called "dirty bomb." "You just use conventional explosives to detonate another substance, that is all. Quite simple."

The system in Ottawa's airport consist of fixed sensors in public corridors, as well as portable devices small enough to be rove the airport grounds in security vehicles.

Fears that terrorists might use such a device were prickled recently with news of a June 2004 report prepared by the national security






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threat assessment centre at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS).

In a copy of the report obtained by The Canadian Press under an Access to Information request, the agency considers the possibility Russian backpack-style bombs lost more than 10 years ago may have wound up in the hands of the al Qaeda terror network.

The report notes that maintaining such devices for so long is very difficult, and suggests a dirty bomb might be a "feasible alternative."

"Except in the most extreme circumstances, it is unlikely that a radiological 'dirty bomb' would result in more casualties than could be achieved with a comparable conventional weapon," the assessment said.




"However, a contaminated area would pose long-term health concerns and could cause panic within the population."

If the devices in Ottawa prove successful, the program is expected to be expanded to airports and cargo docks across the country in 2006. But Bell says it could be a while before the sensors are everywhere.




"They're trying to introduce this equipment on a lot of the border crossings ... and at some of our ports, but this equipment is very, very expensive so it's going to be a long time coming."

Despite the expense, this is not the first such program in the national capital. Last January, CRTI said 40 RCMP police cars fitted with dirty-bomb sensors would cruise the capital.

And in October, Transport Canada and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority introduced document scanners designed to detect radiation on passports or boarding passes.

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