

Staten Island's congressman, Rep. Vito Fossella, said the contamination was a surprise to him and residents near the park, and he demanded more information.

"It is essential for the government to act immediately to fully understand the extent of the contamination," said Fossella, who was trying to arrange a meeting Friday with federal and city officials to discuss further testing and possible removal of the contaminated soil.

One alleged radiation hot spot on Manhattan's east side has the potential for becoming a political hot spot: A strong radiation spike from the area of the Israeli Embassy. Officials would not comment on why they thought that particular area allegedly showed such a stunning peak in radiation.

The aerial survey is designed to help local officials react more quickly in the event of terrorists detonating a "dirty bomb" that releases radioactive material into the air. With the survey, police may be able to pinpoint the exact source of radiation by comparing new readings to their pre-existing "radiation map" of the area.

NYPD spokesman Paul Browne said the department wanted a record of the city's naturally occurring and other "radiological signatures" to compare with periodic readings it does to detect for dirty bombs or other nuclear devices.

"It gives us a baseline so we can pick up any anomalies," he said.

New York City is the only major city to conduct a full-scale Aerial Background Radiation Survey to identify "hot spots," though such work has been done in the nation's capitol, according to the report.

The GAO found neither the Department of Energy nor the Department of Homeland Security believe they are required to conduct such radiation mapping, though the investigators said there were "significant benefits" to surveys in other urban areas.

Homeland Security officials agreed that they should study the cost and effectiveness of expanded radiation mapping in additional cities.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., called the report further proof the federal government is not doing enough to help cities guard against terrorism.

The hot spot mapping initiative "should also be shared with cities across the country, not mothballed because the Homeland Security Department doesn't want to put up the money," Schumer said.

The GAO report also found the Department of Energy may need to beef up security at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland because those sites hold key national assets for responding to a radiological or nuclear attack.

Specialized quick-response teams and equipment are concentrated at those two sites, and a successful attack against either could leave one section of the country with limited capacity to respond to a subsequent strike with radioactive weapons, the GAO said.

The agency's associate administrator, Michael C. Kane, was adamant the sites are safe.

"We categorically reject the contention that physical security at two of our facilities may not be sufficient for protecting against terrorist attacks," Kane wrote.>>

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