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Subject: Gingrich: Electromagnetic pulse attack would be 'catastrophic'

By Darius Dixon

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Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich pressed lawmakers today to give urgent attention to the potentially crippling impacts of an electromagnetic pulse attack on the electric grid.

“Congress should look at EMP attacks as one of the three great threats to our survival — the others would be cyberwarfare and nuclear weapons — and it should regard all three as catastrophic,” he told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. “For us to survive as a civilization we have to be able to defeat all three.”

Several agencies, including the departments of Energy and Homeland Security, are reviewing EMP threats and the issue frequently comes up in Congress.

An EMP attack would be "vastly bigger than 9-11," Gingrich said, and DOE and DHS need to conduct “vigorous” wargames designed to find nodes needing protection.

Acting FERC Chairwoman Cheryl LaFleur said there are technologies available to protect some grid equipment against EMPs.

“The difficulty on the electric grid is knowing where you would deploy the technology to best protect the grid in an effective way. Because when we’re going to mandate a standard for thousands of transmission owners we want to make sure it’s going to work,” she said.

She also voiced confidence that NERC, the grid standard-writing industry group, would develop an EMP regulation if FERC instructed them to.

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