

Nuclear fission, security, IPROs, and how we need you

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What are we willing to do for the sake of national security? It is a depressing fact about the world that this needs to be an issue. I am naturally conditioned to err on the side of less funding for things that are geared towards violence or sensationalism, especially in the face of the large costs that can be used for better purposes. There is an inherent value in preservation of life, but there is also value in assuring that life, while it's lived, stays just and worth living. For this, there must be some compromise between these two, and an in-depth analysis of the pros and cons, risks and benefits, and negative and positive implications of each specific issue that is introduced.

Think of the following example, and not only the ethical, but practical issues involved in the solution: the smuggling of nuclear material and weaponry for the purpose of malicious activity. Considering just how much post-Cold War weapons grade nuclear material is missing, and given news stories about illegal trade and seizures of such

precious product, the danger from this is palpable.

One of the most probable methods of smuggling these items in undetected is by hiding them in Intermodal Cargo Containers, which are the format used to transport goods on cargo ships overseas as well as on trucks and trains overland masses.

The risk of the detonation of a nuclear bomb at a United States port could cause billions of dollars' worth of damage, as well as risk human lives and cause widespread panic. The proposed solution to this is to detect the product before it becomes a threatening issue. In fact, congressional mandates have enacted to address these concerns, particularly a series of acts made in 2007 that demanded that the best available technology be investigated and used at ports to detect such dangerous weapon grade, high-z nuclear material by 2012. However, there are severe practical problems as well as ethical ones that forestall the process.

My IPRO group 497-209, "Developing a New Strategy to Detect Smuggled Nuclear Material" focuses on this very problem, thinking about the practical,

ethical, legal, and scientific ramifications, and devises new ways of scanning cargo containers that will optimize the process by making it more efficient, safe, and useful towards that goal. One thing we could do is try to calculate chances of a bomb being smuggled without being detected given the current nuclear prowess and socio-political climate of the world. We still must remain cognizant of -- if the mathematical and design aspects of the project pan out -- the monetary costs, possible health effects, and the effects to the shipping process these would cause, but what might be even more important is the issues others have with the concept we are proposing.

The survey found by going to tinyurl.com/cargoscan was designed specifically for that. As a recent IIT Today post explains, it exists "to gauge the prior knowledge about, reactions from, and levels of concern towards the subject matter of the general public (centralized in the Illinois Tech population) to ensure that all angles are addressed and to gauge how best to present the findings of their project to maximize understanding."

We will be collecting responses until

Thursday, November 12, and would love if those listening with opinions would fill it out, to help us figure out what goals in addition to the ones we've already discussed might be applicable.

Things that are applicable include: how people in general feel about the possibility of misuse of dangerous machinery at cargo ports, health risks from being hit by a scanning beam, the probabilities of false negatives, slowing down shipping process, obligation to educate of risks, and many more. We've had in-depth discussions with Kelly Laas from our Ethics Library on the second floor of Hermann Hall, but that's only one voice out of all the rest of them that this would be affecting, so we ask you to help us get more.

We have done a lot on the part of researching the science, technology, and effects on certain materials, including the issues, but we won't be much closer until we get an idea of what people think about this. I encourage everyone to start and continue thinking about these sorts of issues, and a great start would be to answer our 3 page survey at tinyurl.com/cargoscan.

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CAMPUS

Union Board fills Halloween weekend with fun

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Halloween weekend is a time of spooks, scares and freaky costumes. Union Board made sure that the spirit of Halloween could be felt throughout campus, holding numerous activities. From spooky movie marathons to hayrides, Union Board had Halloween covered.

The fun and activities started on Wednesday at lunch time. The Student Organization Trick or Treat took place on the MTCC Bridge, providing students with a way to learn more about different organizations, including National Society of Black Engineers, Vedic Vision Society and IT-Cru. Each table had candy and little prizes. At the beginning,

by Global Grounds students could pick up a bag to collect their goodies in. Some tables had fun things to do such as ASA's table where students could design their own mini ghost, and the sisters were going to hang them in their house. This turned out to be a fun way to get to know more student organizations, while getting rewarded at the same time.

Starting at 3p.m. on Wednesday screams and spooky sounds could be heard throughout the MTCC, coming from Center Court, where Union Board was holding a movie marathon of spooky Halloween movies. They played three movies in total, Hocus Pocus, Nightmare on Elm Street and Halloweentown. Many turned out to watch part of or the entire marathon, and the sounds gave a spooky feel to

the entire MTCC until 9 p.m.

On Thursday the festivities continued, with a Halloweek Hustle on the MTCC Bridge during lunch. This activity was similar to the trick or treating the day before, but instead of only student organizations, there were different companies present as well. Upkey, a website that helps students find jobs and internships was there, along with UNICER, Student Government Association and Union Board. The Union Board table had guessing games and other activities to do in the hope of winning prizes. The prizes included headphones, Bluetooth speakers, and more.

At 7 p.m. on Thursday, the Union Board had a Greek Spooktacular planned to take place on the Quad. It began to drizzle a

little, but that didn't dampen the spirits.

Friday during lunch, Union Board had a horse drawn hayride, touring through the campus. The horse's name was Rave, and he was adorable. He paraded through campus an old, 1800's cart, creating a historic feel to the event. Rave started the hayrides in front of Galvin Library and traversed most of campus, hitting all the scenic buildings and areas.

Lastly, Union Board held a special Halloween Dance in the Bog Saturday night. It had a spooky and funky feel to it, with a tarot card reader and photo booth. Many appeared, in costume and not in costume, creating a fun, spirited atmosphere that rounded out the holiday nicely.

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