



**One Hundred Tenth Congress**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 2, 2008

The Honorable Michael Chertoff  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

In response to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the White House unveiled the Homeland Security Advisory Color Coded System in March 2002. The advisory color coded system was created as a guide for the American people if Federal government officials had reason to believe that specific, credible information involving a threat to a particular sector or geographic region existed. Additionally, this system was intended to provide a comprehensive and effective means of disseminating information regarding the risk of terrorist acts to governmental authorities as well as the general public.

With minor exceptions, the system has remained virtually unaltered since its inception. While the system may have been sufficient initially, with the formation of the Department and the many developments in the area of domestic homeland security that that occurred since 2002, it may be prudent to re-examine the current sufficiency of this color-coded advisory system.

Thus, I am writing to you to share a few concerns about the Department's Homeland Security Advisory Color Coded System. First, the system assigns a threat condition representing the apparent risk of a terrorist act, but provides no information on actions that should be taken by the public in response to the risk.

Second, the Homeland Security Advisory system is currently a five threat condition system. Since the system's inception in March 2002, the two lowest threat conditions, low (green) and guarded (blue), have never been used.

While some may question whether the system has outlived its usefulness, I believe that the current system can be improved to provide the American people with the kind of information they need to effectively respond to the level of risk that the color codes are intended to relay.

Please provide the following information:

- 1) A narrative description of the rationale underlying the current 5 threat condition color coded system;
- 2) A narrative explaining the circumstances that would need to exist for the Department to lower the threat level to a low or guarded threat condition;
- 3) A narrative explaining the rationale underlying the decision to forgo the publication of generally available guidelines corresponding to the color code advisory system, and;
- 4) A narrative description of the list of suggested actions that were given to the general public when the Advisory System was raised to "Severe" for commercial flights originating from the United Kingdom in 2006.

Pursuant to Rule X(3)(g) and Rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, please respond no later than January 16, 2008. Should you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact Cherri Branson, Chief Oversight Counsel, at (202) 226-2616. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bennie G. Thompson  
Chairman