

CDC and Bioterrorism : Anthrax Response *A Communications Perspective*

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Office of the Director
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(1997-2002)

September, 2002



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CDC Overview

- National Public Health Agency
8,500 employees in 170 disciplines
- Best known for “**Disease Detectives**”
- **Atlanta** National HQ
- CDC includes 12 Centers, Institutes and Offices
- **\$4 Billion** budget



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CDC Media Relations Public Health in the News



CDC

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Communication Industry Today

- 2,901 broadcast TV stations
- 2,278 daily newspapers
- 12,687 magazines
- 109,574,429 web sites (01/01)
(17,000 health-related sites)
- CDC in the news:
2001 – 17,205
1990 - 6,330

CDC

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The World Changes



Tragic Event Activates
Emergency Response
Systems

Communication
Centralized

CDC Responds

CDC

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10/4/01 World Changes Again

A Nation Challenged

The New York Times

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2001

BACKGROUND: BIOTERRORISM

ANTIBIOTICS

U.S. supply would treat
2 million for anthrax

New drug that fights disease wasn't fully tested

By NICK TONER
ntoner@nytimes.com

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say stockpiles of flu-like symptoms are enough, antibiotics to people in the event of outbreaks of anthrax. The size of the National Stockpile, a closely guarded war chest, is still at the moment. THE drug used enough to slugged a within 12

The New York Times

ANTHRAX LETTER
AWAITS DISCOVERY,
C.D.C. CHIEF HINTS

Spores in Mailrooms of Supreme
Court, C.I.A. and Army Lab

Flulike symptoms?
It could be the flu

Many Lessons
To Be Learned

With Anthrax

Authorities Discovering
How Little They Know

By GINA KOLATA

Anthrax
episode
growing

Cipro omi

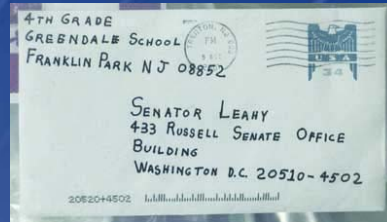
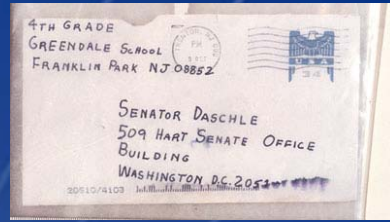
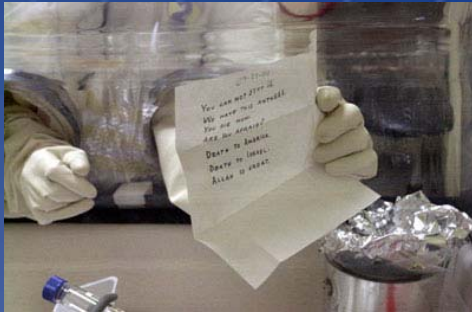
By CHARLES S
casebrook@nytimes.com

ANTHRAX MYSTERY
No easy answer in Florida case

By M.A.J. MUKENNA
mmukenna@nytimes.com

CDC

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And it only got more complicated from here...

A multi-state investigation intensified



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Adapting to a Crisis: Stick to the Basics

- **Timely and Accurate Release of Information**
- **Media Response**
- **Issues Management**
- **Promotion**



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Release of Information Multi-Channel

- **Press Releases** - Two daily updates
- Daily **Telebriefings**
- **Audio** News Release – English and Spanish
- **VNR**, Bites and B-roll – Broadcast and Web
- **MAT** Article
- Individual **Interviews**, Field Press Conferences
- Professional Satellite **Trainings**



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Surge Capacity 350 Press Calls Per Day

- Shift Press Officers to Media Response;
12/7 to 24/7
- Deploy Press Officers with Investigation
Teams
- Create Teams - Expanded Work
Hours/Schedules



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CDC - By the Numbers

October 1, 2001 – January 19, 2002

Phone press briefings	Press Releases	Press calls	Print media mentions	Broadcast interviews aired
23 (1,909 journalists)	44	7,737	12,454	306

- 10/18/01 VNR - aired 923 times, 50 M audience
- 12/13/01 VNR - aired 216 times, 34 M audience
- 3 ANRs replayed 1,359 times reaching 10.7 M
- CDC PHTN hosted 10 programs reaching 10.3 M
- CDC responded to 18,000 public inquiries



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Lessons Learned

Communication: Integral part of response across CDC – various audiences

- Get News Out Quickly: Don't Speculate
- Timelines: Accuracy
- Trusted Spokespersons
- Stay in your Niche
- Daily Updates Essential



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RISK COMMUNICATION

- Don't over reassure
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Emphasize the process and next steps
- Give anticipatory guidance
- Be regretful, not defensive
- Acknowledge people's fears
- Express through "wishes"
- Give people things to do



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Take Away Tips

- Stay Calm – Set the Tone
- Rotate Staff
- Rotate Leadership (hardest to do)
- Don't Take it Personally
- Let it Go
- Be Flexible
- Ask for help



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FOODBORNE OUTBREAK

- Communicate what you know for sure
- Transmission: Food only? Person to person ?
- Communicate Next Steps - process
- Communicate about your niche only
 - Group Telebriefings
 - Point to others web sites
 - Investigation findings will always precede regulatory decisions



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A Balancing Act

Meeting the
Needs of
the Media

Timely and
Accurate
Release of
Information



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Thinking Globally -- Working Locally

A Conference on Food Safety Education