

Terror Attacks: Are We Prepared?

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Testimony

Good morning Chairman Gregg and members of the Committee. I am Michael Sellitto, Deputy Fire Chief in charge of Special Operations for the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. I am pleased to be here today to offer testimony on how DC Fire/EMS prepares to keep citizens and visitors to the District of Columbia safe during special events.

The Special Operations Division has planning responsibilities for all special events for which fire, emergency medical services and/or specialized support is requested or required. As Deputy Chief, Special Operations, I oversee planning, training, and response of the DC Fire/EMS hazardous materials and technical rescue teams including urban search and rescue, high angle, trench collapse, structural collapse, confined space, and water rescue. I am also responsible for DC Fire/EMS preparations for response to any WMD incident.

Special Events in the District of Columbia – Guiding Principles

Planning for special events in the District of Columbia is a regular activity for many agencies in DC Government. There are always special events happening in the District ranging from the festivals, athletic events, and block parties of every community in the nation to specialized events, such as presidential inaugurations or the recent WWII Memorial Dedication, that are held only in the nation's capitol. DC Fire/EMS was involved in planning for the recent funeral for former President Ronald Regan, and regularly participates in planning for State of the Union Addresses. We are currently planning for the upcoming 2005 presidential inauguration, with representation on twenty-five (25) planning committees, a number that will grow as the event draws closer.

DC Fire/EMS uses an all hazards approach to planning for major special events. Each event is unique and has its own special set of circumstances to be considered. The level of protection provided for each event has many variables. The factors that are considered include, but are not limited to, VIP attendance, the level of security screening provided for attendees, the number of attendees, threat intelligence directed at the event, the nature and/or sponsor of the event, projected weather extremes, and event specific hazards such

as fireworks. A Unified Command presence is established at all major special events to ensure the command and control of assets is a coordinated effort. In this way, we can be sure that the appropriate assets are already in place for unplanned events, should they occur. The ultimate goal, of course, is that everyone goes home safely at the end of the day.

Coordination and Interoperability between Agencies and Jurisdictions

In the District, the Mayor's Special Events Task Group meets regularly to review proposals for events. This group of representatives from local and federal agencies has responsibility for ensuring that special events are conducted in a safe and secure environment. This Task Group and DC Fire/EMS have been planning for special events in the District for many years. Since September 11, the level of planning, cooperation, and coordination has improved and expanded.

In the District, federal agencies very often are the lead agency responsible for security or are the lead agency on whose property the event occurs. Events on US parkland are coordinated with the National Park Service Special Events Office, and we provide support as requested by the US Capitol Police Special Events Office, and to the US Secret Service Planning Committee for any National Special Security Events or those that require coverage for Secret Service protectees. DC Fire/EMS regularly works closely with the FBI, FEMA, DOD, DOE, and HHS. The planning meetings have the goal of developing action plans, which are utilized to plan and direct operations during an event.

The relationships developed through these planning groups greatly benefits DC Fire/EMS. We know very well the players involved from each participating agency, federal and local. This is extremely important in the event of any unplanned incidents, independent of or associated with major special events. In such an event, these "players" would need to come together quickly to determine an appropriate incident response. The strong relationships developed prior to unplanned events makes this possible.

We also have very strong relationships with other Fire/EMS departments in the National Capital Region (NCR). The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Fire Chiefs Committee and subcommittees are invaluable for developing regional coordination and response. A Standardized Incident Command System has been adopted in the region; there are standing Mutual Aid Plans, a Mutual Aid Operations Plan and Field Operation Guide.

Additional regional issues are being addressed and are supported by Urban Area Security Initiative monies. In conjunction with the National Fire Academy, a regional Incident Management Team (IMT) has been developed, which allows specially trained members from the NCR to provide incident support in the planning, command, operation, logistics and finance areas to any jurisdiction in need – whether for a planned, or unplanned event. The NCR has an 800 MHz radio system that is shared by most of the surrounding jurisdictions. This allows direct communications between the mutual aid partners.

Some Lessons Learned

DC Fire/EMS is always assessing our response to incidents and our plans for special events. Past experience shows us that including increased Incident Command and use of an Incident Management Team from the early planning stages of special events is valuable. As noted earlier, this allows for needed assets and command structures to be in place prior to any unplanned incident that could emerge during a major special event. Another important lesson is the value of working with health agencies to provide nurses and physicians on site during major special events. This decreases the need for transport to hospitals, increases the level of pre-hospital care available to special event attendees, and stages nurses and physicians closer to potential casualties of an unplanned incident.

DC Fire/EMS Responsibilities in the District Response Plan

In response to the attacks of September 11, the District of Columbia government focused great effort to assess and revise city emergency plans. A Domestic Preparedness Task Force was formed with representatives including, among others, heads of District agencies with public safety and emergency functions. The Task Force and the District's Emergency Management Agency developed the new District Response Plan. This Plan sets out the framework for District government response to public emergencies in the metropolitan Washington area. The District has identified 15 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) that supplement the Basic Response Plan. Each ESF has its own purpose and scope with operating responsibilities and identified lead and support agencies. DC Fire/EMS has lead responsibilities for three ESFs: ESF#4 – Firefighting, ESF#9 – Urban Search and Rescue, and ESF #10 – Hazardous Materials. The Department has a substantial support role for two other ESFs: ESF#6 – Mass Care, and ESF#8 – Health and Medical Services.

Some Enhancements at DC Fire/EMS Since September 11, 2001

Prior to September 11, certain response capabilities were already being enhanced with the growing threat of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Since September 11, with the assistance of Federal funding, capabilities have been further enhanced in areas of response apparatus, technical equipment, response training and staffing. Department of Homeland Security funding has been received in a timely fashion, allowing many of these enhancements to be accomplished. This has freed up local funding to be used for other enhancements, such as staffing, which have not been permitted under DHS funding guidelines.

Specifically for increased response capabilities, the following assets have been added to DC Fire/EMS apparatus fleet since September 11:

- 12 Ready Reserve Ambulances (ALS capable) - placed in service with certified

administrative or recalled personnel when needed,

- 2 Mass Casualty Trucks - each equipped to handle fifty patients,
- 2 Ambuses – capable of transporting ambulatory & non-ambulatory patients,
- 1 WMD Response Truck – to provide support equipment for WMD events,
- 1 Radiation Response Truck – to provide additional monitoring screening and decontamination at a radiological event,
- 10 Ready Reserve Engines – placed in service with recalled personnel, and
- 3 Ready Reserve Ladder Trucks – placed in service with recalled personnel.

DC Fire/EMS rewrote its “Mobilization Plan” after September 11, to address concerns for additional personnel recall procedures, staffing guidelines, and the use of decentralized “Area Commands.”

The increased fleet is also utilized to support special events as needed, which allows DC Fire/EMS to maintain our normal level of service to District residents as a whole, while also providing the necessary enhanced coverage to special event sites.

Other equipment placed in service and upgraded since September 11 includes:

- State-of-the-art chemical detection equipment on various units,
- Biological screening equipment on our Hazardous Materials Unit,
- Radiation detection equipment citywide,
- Enhanced medical equipment on all of our EMS units,
- Stockpiles of necessary medical equipment are on-hand for sustained response during the early stages of a potential biological incident, and
- Mark 1 kits (nerve agent antidote) have been placed in front line response units.

Additional decontamination capabilities include:

- Decontamination tents,
- Tent heaters,
- Water heaters,
- Redress, and
- Necessary support equipment

All members of DC Fire/EMS have been trained in gross decontamination techniques, which are utilized in the event of a WMD incident.

Training is essential DC Fire/EMS’s ability to carry out our mission. Since September 11, DC Fire/EMS has undertaken an enhancement program that has trained additional numbers of personnel in all technical areas, including training for:

- all uniformed members to the hazardous materials operations level, NFPA 472 Standard
- all EMS personnel to NFPA 473 Standard,
- 200 hazardous materials technicians,
- 120 rescue technicians,
- Specialist training programs, such as those offered by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Domestic Preparedness, including:
 - o COBRA live agent training,

- o Incident Response to Terrorist Bombings live explosives course, and
- o Nevada Test Site WMD Radiological/Nuclear Course,
- Advanced EMT training for EMS personnel, which enables all EMS personnel to administer seven (7) medications and use advanced airway techniques.

Included, as attachments to this prepared testimony, are documents that help to illustrate the type of response, special event planning, and incident command structure in place in the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. The attachments are focused on EMS Special Operations, WMD response, and EMS Incident Command.

DC Fire/EMS takes very seriously the mission to protect life and property through fire suppression, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, fire prevention and education, and pre-hospital care and transportation services to people within the District of Columbia. The Department's readiness for major special events in the District, any potential unplanned WMD events, and other emergencies are always in practice and always improving.

This completes my prepared testimony. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.