

Preparing the Nation: A National Policy Summit on Domestic Terrorism

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JULY 10-11, 2001

SUMMARY OF TABLETOP EXERCISE

The tabletop exercise provided an opportunity for Policy Summit participants to observe critical executive-level decision-making and problem solving under the unique operating conditions generated by a terrorist event. The scenario is plausible, and events occur as they are presented. The exercise is not constrained by the real time portrayal of the subject. The scenario and consequences are based on a hypothetical situation and are not intended as a forecast or projection of future terrorist-related events or activities.

The scenario depicts activities and events associated with a bioterrorist attack in the fictional city of Gotham, the capital of the State of New Aberdeen. The State of New Aberdeen is located on the east coast of the northeastern United States. Gotham, the capitol, is a port city located on the Atlantic Seaboard, and is a popular tourist destination for domestic and international travelers. In addition to being a tourist Mecca, Gotham serves as a distribution, finance, insurance, and medical center.

The players are introduced to this crisis during an Expert Emergency Epidemic Response Committee meeting. The Governor has convened the Committee to review what measures need to be considered to deal with the emerging event. The Committee addressed three episodes of a terrorism scenario. Each begins with a brief multimedia situation update, followed by a series of topical questions and a facilitator-moderated discussion. Policy Summit participants had a chance to contribute to the discussion, and to question Committee members during the moderated discussion.

Tabletop Moderator:

Corey Gruber, OSLDPS, U.S. Department of Justice

Governor of New Aberdeen

Stan McKinney, OSLDPS, U.S. Department of Justice

Governor's Expert Emergency Response Committee

Governor's Law Enforcement Advisor: Ed Buikema, Director, Emergency Management Division, MI State Police

Governor's Press Secretary: John Cox, Press Secretary, Office of Governor Frank Keating

State Emergency Management Director: Ellen Gordon, Director, Iowa Emergency Management Agency

Public Health Director: Dr. Marci Layton, Assist. Commissioner, Communicable Disease Program, NY City Health Dept.

Governor's Chief of Staff: Bruce Morris, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety, Commonwealth of Virginia

Governor's Legal Counsel: Bill Nicholson, Widener University School of Law

Members of the Press

The members of the press participated in the exercise as members of the press.

Jackie Bensen, Reporter, NBC4, Washington, D.C.

Federal Resource Panel

A Federal Resource Panel included representatives from the FBI, CDC, EPA, FEMA, PHS, DoD, and Red Cross. They served as a resource regarding federal crisis and consequence management assets and activities.

EPISODE I

Episode Summary

A clandestine methamphetamine laboratory was destroyed in a fire. The investigation revealed a second laboratory apparently designed to produce biological materials. One individual was arrested at the scene. A second individual escaped and has not been apprehended. Large quantities of chemicals and equipment associated with methamphetamine manufacture, neo-nazi literature and paraphernalia, weapons, and reference materials for production of biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction were found at the property. Several containers labeled as "*plague slurry, 1 gm/ml*" were discovered in a vehicle on the property. The content of the containers has not been confirmed. An interagency assessment has deemed the potential threat to be credible.

Governor's Committee Reactions to the Scenario

The Public Health Director identified a number of questions that would drive their initial response:

- Is the content of the container actually plague slurry?
- Has the slurry been released?

The Public Health Director also identified actions that would be initiated at this stage:

- Prioritize laboratory assessment of the slurry at the State Lab
- Initiate surveillance of hospitals to determine whether patients are presenting with unexplained pneumonias or other infectious diseases. In addition, syndromic surveillance for increases in influenza-like illness would be useful to detect. If an outbreak is detected, an epidemiologic investigation would be implemented immediately in collaboration with law enforcement authorities to determine the exact site of exposure;
- Prepare contingency plans for both mass medical care and mass antibiotic prophylactic treatment;
- Alert Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to the potential threat and request their help for confirmation of the contents of the container and epidemiologic assistance; would also need to notify regional public health authorities to be on alert for a potential outbreak;
- Pre-Prepare educational materials for healthcare providers on the clinical management of plague (diagnosis, treatment, isolation requirements) to distribute to hospitals in the event that slurry is confirmed as plague. Would also pre-prepare materials for the general public to be posted on internet and for training hotline staff.

The Governor's Committee Recommendations

- The Chief of Staff requests the Legal Counsel to investigate the authority under which the Governor can respond.
- The Governor's Legal Counsel recommends planning for prioritized treatment for emergency responders, critical infrastructure staff, and their families. He also states that

the Governor has broad authority to bring all state resources to bear in responding to either an actual or threatened emergency or disaster.

- The Public Health Director suggests establishing a contingency plan outlining the potential response priorities, which include containing the outbreak, providing medical care for the exposed persons, and initiating communication with the public and healthcare providers.
- The Public Health Director also advises against declaring an emergency, at this time, due to a lack of information.
- The Governor's Law Enforcement Advisor recommends bringing in the Mayor of Gotham in order to localize the decisionmaking process.
- The Press Secretary suggests addressing the public the morning after in order to gather more information prior to issuing a press release.
- The Governor recommends developing a communications strategy and gathering response equipment and protective gear to prepare the responders.

Participant Questions and Comments

Q. Who is in charge of the investigation at this time?

At this stage, the Aberdeen Public Health Department is in charge of the public health-related investigation, including the diagnostic testing of the slurry that was found inside the trailer and initiating surveillance to determine if a release occurred in Gotham. However, the FBI is in charge of the criminal investigation, which pertains to the outside of the trailer.

Q. Has the chain of custody for handling the slurry specimen been established?

There is an established protocol between law enforcement and public health authorities for the chain of custody in this type of situation, which will be followed.

Q. Does the law enforcement investigation have the same access to information as the public health investigation?

In circumstances such as these where there is a credible threat of a bioterrorist event, there is equal access to information, which works best if there are pre-existing alliances and formal agreements between the departments.

Episode II

Episode Summary

The results of testing on the container contents confirm the presence of a highly virulent strain of *Y. pestis*. Inquiries to local hospitals identified two unusual clusters of teenagers and young adults with severe respiratory conditions. Their symptomology, supported by presumptive laboratory results, is consistent with probable exposure to pneumonic plague. The first patient admitted has died. Earlier illnesses and fatalities may also be attributable to plague exposure. Fire and EMS agencies have reported several runs for patients with suspected plague exposure. A van located in a downtown-parking garage was equipped with a jury-rigged spray device

used to discharge aerosolized *Y. pestis*. The van is located upwind of a popular dance club. The local media are reporting a possible terrorist attack, have characterized it as biological, and are prepared to identify the agent as plague. National networks are expected to air reports momentarily.

The Governor's Committee Recommendations

- The Governor's Chief of Staff recommends preparing and issuing a public statement.
- The Public Health Director suggests prioritizing the ongoing surveillance and epidemiologic investigation to determine the exact site and time of the event, and implementing the contingency plans for mass care and prophylaxis, and also recommends stepping up response coordination with the Federal government (including requests for assistance from the CDC for epidemiologic assistance and from OEP and CDC for medical staff (DMAT) and antibiotic resources as hospitals will quickly become overwhelmed.
- The Governor's Legal Counsel stated that the Governor clearly has authority to mandate a Quarantine, but warned of potential civil rights issues if citizens are forcibly quarantined. He added that public health and safety is an important enough government interest that the quarantine should proceed anyway, if the Governor should agree with health officials who might advise that it is needed.

Press Comments

The press representative indicated that most news organizations would have broken the story earlier, with or without the Governor's press release. She noted that the press would have had enough information from inside sources that the news would have already been issued to the public therefore, the Governor's press release would have been untimely and less effective than if it had been released earlier.

Federal Panel Comments

- The FBI indicates that the key aspects to making this a successful response include coordination, trust, effective liaison relationships, and sharing of state assets.
- DOD emphasizes that its role in this scenario is one of support to the state and local agencies.
- CDC notes that the release of the pharmaceutical stockpile is much more complicated than has been described and would have to be initiated at an earlier stage in order to be released at an appropriate time.
- The Red Cross comments that preparations related to mass care have not been addressed adequately at this stage.
- PHS identifies mass care preparations as lacking at this point and also explains that alternative methods for care, such as home-care, should be investigated.
- EPA notes their role as support to state and local responders.

Participant Questions and Comments

- There should be a registry of any infected people, based on location.
- The current circumstances do not warrant quarantine.
- A hotline should be established to answer public concerns.
- An informed, clear, and consistent message from the public health department will eliminate potential discrediting down the line.
- Dispensing of antibiotics is a difficult and expensive undertaking. It often proves to be overkill and burdensome to the response process.
- Establishing a website would help to facilitate public information dissemination.
- Containment is currently the most effective response.
- Develop a primary group of talking heads so that a consistent and reliable source of information is available to the public.

Q. How is recovery being addressed at this stage?

Recovery activities are the concern of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

EPISODE III

Episode Summary

The City and County of Gotham declared a local emergency and requested state and federal assistance. The Governor made an emergency proclamation and requested federal assistance. The President made an emergency declaration. Local, State, and Federal agencies and departments are engaged in dealing with the worsening crisis. Surrounding counties and States are monitoring the situation and taking precautionary steps in anticipation of the potential spread of the disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) and a host of countries are closely monitoring developments; several countries are on the verge of imposing travel restrictions. Problems are occurring in mass distribution of medications. The number of victims now appears to be relatively small, and confined predominately to UNA students.

The Governor's Committee Recommendations

- The Governor's Law Enforcement Advisor recommends that the National Guard be involved to provide support to various state agencies.
- The Governor's Emergency Management Director disagrees and suggests that the Governor's use of the National Guard has the potential for sparking panic in the citizenry. She recommends utilizing the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) to muster additional state police assistance from neighboring states.
- The Governor's Chief of Staff suggests enacting the Civil Support Teams (CSTs).

Participant Comments and Questions

- CSTs should have been enacted earlier and should be enacted by the Governor, not as a federalized entity, because they are more flexible under the Governor's authority.

Q. In reference to all of the parties involved, which party is responsible for initiating quarantine?

The authority for initiating quarantine varies from state to state. In this scenario, consensus indicates the enactment is left to state and local authorities i.e., the Governor. However, in some states, such as Virginia, the State Health Officer calls for quarantine, but with significant coordination with their Governor.

Q. Which assets, either federal or state, are reimbursable?

If the Federal Response Plan (FRP) is implemented, reimbursement is 75% of Federal assets and 25% of state assets. The reimbursement policy for private hospitals is currently unclear and is in the process of being resolved.

Overall Comments from the Governor's Committee

- The Governor's Law Enforcement Advisor stated that a unified command system is key to an effective response. He also noted that this type of command must be initiated at the earliest stages of an incident to ensure success.
- The Governor's Press Secretary identified early, accurate, and often information dissemination as the most efficient process for keeping the public informed. He also noted that the Internet and hotlines are highly successful tools for information dissemination, which should be employed in future responses.
- The State Emergency Management Director expressed the need for pre-incident planning as indispensable for an effectual response. She specifically addressed planning in regards to establishing a quarantine process and to developing a communications strategy.
- The Public Health Director accredited disease surveillance and epidemiologic investigation as the most important tools for an effective response. This data will be essential to determining the site of the event, and to monitor ongoing morbidity and mortality in order to assess resource needs for mass medical care and mass prophylaxis so that sufficient federal resources can be requested.
- The Governor's Chief of Staff identified coordination between agencies at all levels as a tool for facilitating response activities.
- The Governor's Legal Counsel noted that states need to preempt policy questions by developing clear and concise authority guidelines. He added that clear procedures for cost recovery and employing the use of federal medical staff would strengthen the recovery process.