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## **Bold Steps in Preparedness: Training for biological attacks at the Center for Domestic Preparedness**

Submitted by CDP External Affairs

On the morning of February 8, 26 responders from more than a dozen states made history when they donned Personal Protective Equipment and entered a unique training facility in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. These individuals were the first group of responders to train with biological materials at the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Center for Domestic Preparedness in Anniston, Ala.

This historic training opportunity is now being repeated on a weekly basis for responders from all over the country. It was preceded by months of preparation and planning and had its genesis after multiple homeland security studies and real world events pointed to the need for increased preparedness against a biological attack in the United States.

"It's our job to prepare our nation's responders for the potential threats they could face in the field and the threat of biological materials continues to top the list of potential preparedness problems," said CDP Superintendent Dr. Christopher T. Jones. "This enhanced training fills a critical need."

Initially piloted in two CDP courses—Technical Emergency Response Training for CBRNE Incidents (TERT) and Hazard Assessment and Response Management for CBRNE Incidents (HARM), the CDP will eventually include biological materials in three additional courses over the next year.

"Biological materials, probably more than any other, are the ones we should be most concerned about," said Josh Erdman, a fire fighter and paramedic from Madison, Wisc. "There are very few places that offer this level of biological training with access to the materials, with results like you would get in the real world."

The biological materials used in CDP training, *Bacillus anthracis* delta Sterne and ricin A-chain, mean the CDP is the only place where civilian first responders can now train using both biological materials and toxic chemical agents.

"I feel more comfortable dealing with [biological] threats having this level of training," said Tim Halberson, a paramedic from Nekoosa, Wisconsin. "I can take this knowledge and pass it on to my department and other EMS services I work with."

"I have more confidence should I encounter biological [materials] in the field," agreed Andrew Higgins, a paramedic from Denver, Colo. "I have the confidence to operate in protective equipment, and I know that I have the skills necessary to work in these environments."



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## **Modern Training for a Modern Threat**

The CDP has trained using nerve agents GB and VX for nearly 14 years. Demand for specialized training using biological agents has grown over the last few years as the potential for biological attacks has been identified in reports such as the October 2011 Bio-Response Report Card, which concluded “the nation does not yet have adequate bio-response capability to meet fundamental expectations during a large-scale biological event.”

“We’re excited to offer this training to the first response community because it fills a critical need in our country,” said Denis Campeau, CDP director of training and education. “The integration of biological agents will enable first responders to learn the proper and safe response to a biological agent release and resulting emergency response.”

Just last November the FBI arrested four men in Georgia accused of plotting terrorist attacks on U.S. cities using ricin. Training with ricin provides responders a better understanding of how this toxin may be employed, and how to protect themselves from exposure. *Bacillus anthracis delta Sterne* is a uniquely derived, nonpathogenic cousin of the organism that causes anthrax.

The objective of CDP’s live agent training is for emergency personnel to trust in their ability to identify potentially harmful situations, use detection equipment properly, and trust that their personal protective equipment will shield them from exposure.

“This brings the threat to the forefront, and makes it a reality,” said Timothy Cox, who controls security for his hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio. “This is something the response community will face in due time.”

“Biological materials are more prevalent now,” agreed Chris Kollin, a police officer from Cleveland, Ohio. “The threat has increased dramatically and we need to be appropriately prepared to deal with them.”

Since the equipment used to detect biological agents is different than monitoring equipment for chemical agents, the CDP allows responders to practice with a broad range of technologies while verifying the effectiveness with both biological and chemical agents.



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## **Reality in the Real World**

All live agent training is done safely and securely inside the CDP's Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological (COBRA) Training Facility. The COBRA is the nation's only toxic agent training facility for civilian emergency responders.

"Having the ability to train in a live biological environment, feel comfortable in protective equipment, and receive up-to-date training on the latest survey and monitoring techniques was beneficial," said Higgins, the paramedic from Denver, Colo.

Before biological materials were introduced into the training environment, the CDP created scenarios similar to scenes where anthrax and ricin may be deployed. The CDP took two of its training bays commonly used with chemical agent training and fashioned a post office environment and a restaurant scene. The training bays add to the reality of the threat, and provide first responders a realistic scenario to conduct an analysis of the biological material and demonstrate the appropriate response.

"Research has shown that responders who train with actual agents, biological or otherwise, walk away with the confidence they need to respond effectively and safely," said Rick Dickson, assistant director of training delivery at the CDP. "They know that when they respond to an event at home they have the training to meet the hazard face-to-face, and know they will emerge unharmed because they wore the gear properly, and the gear protected them. That level of confidence cannot be duplicated outside of the CDP training environment."

"Prior to training, this was something I had very little knowledge about," said Cox, the hospital security specialist from Cincinnati, Ohio. "Now, I am armed with more information, and I feel more comfortable working with biologicals. Standing in a room with something like that and knowing that it is survivable and it can be controlled, it can be worked with, and it can be cleaned up is a confidence builder."

## **All-Hazards Response Training for Today's Responder**

When the CDP was founded in 1998, it was envisioned as strictly a resident training facility that would train a maximum of 10,000 responders per year. Since then the CDP has grown to include nationwide training for approximately 90,000 graduates a year—a testament to the importance first responders have placed on preparedness.

CDP training focuses on incident management, mass casualty response, and emergency response to a catastrophic natural disaster or terrorist act. Training for state, local, and tribal responders is fully funded by FEMA, a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



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In addition to unique chemical and biological venues, the CDP offers the latest techniques and procedures and provides responders the chance to use a broad range of equipment during their training. The courses offered also provide Continuing Education Units (CEU) that may be used to fulfill professional requirements. All instructors at the CDP are required to have at least 10 years of emergency response experience before they are even considered for a position. Qualified instructors are carefully selected based on experience, knowledge of national response elements, and teaching ability.

Designing courses that are relevant to modern threats that affect America's citizens is core to the CDP's principles of prevention, deterrence, response, and recovery. Returning responders to their home jurisdiction with the confidence and knowledge to engage life threatening events ensures a more prepared force.

The CDP is a component of FEMA's National Training and Education Division in the Department of Homeland Security. The Anniston training center is the nation's only federally-chartered Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) training facility for civilian responders.

Learn more about the CDP at <http://cdp.dhs.gov>.

*As part of its training CDP will be using two biological materials: ricin A-chain and Bacillus anthracis delta Sterne. These materials will allow our first responders the opportunity to detect biological agents they might encounter. However, the CDP will only be using the nonpathogenic forms of both materials. These two strains will help us maintain the safety of everyone associated with the training because they do not produce the same toxins/disease as the uniquely different sister forms of these materials.*

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*FEMA's mission is to support its citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.*