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Thinking About Deliberate Releases: Steps Your Community Can Take

CEPP

Technical Assistance Bulletin

Recent incidents, such as the deliberate chemical release in Tokyo, Japan, highlight the need to ensure that local emergency response plans consider this possibility, however slight it may be. The United States government has structures and mechanisms in place to address situations like the Japanese subway incident. However, state and local authorities and first responders need to be well prepared.

Under the Federal Response Plan (FRP)*, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) would provide the lead for coordinating a federal effort for health and medical services. It would be supported by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Defense (DOD), and other agencies.

This bulletin's objective is to bring to your attention how your local emergency plan review process can address deliberate releases and to provide suggestions for rapid action. This bulletin should not cause undue alarm about the likelihood of deliberate releases (as they remain highly improbable events). Throughout the plan review process, the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) should coordinate with local fire, police, and health and environmental departments, hospitals, and other government agencies and organizations that may play a role in responding to a deliberate release.

Most of the elements contained in your emergency response plan are directly applicable to a deliberate release scenario. Some key differences remain, however. The following section suggests areas of your emergency response plan that may need additional development.

The checklist below is not intended to be exhaustive. However, it should trigger taking another look at your plan to ensure that it meets special needs. We suggest that an LEPC meeting is an appropriate way to address this matter.

PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE

First Steps

- ☐ Determine if there are independent efforts in your community addressing deliberate releases (e.g., by the police and fire departments), and if so, coordinate these efforts with community emergency response planning efforts.
- ☐ Assess the likelihood of a deliberate release and potential locations, such as transportation facilities, water treatment plants, and natural gas facilities, where a release may occur in order to focus planning.

Training and Equipment

Ensure that your plan:

- ☐ Requires personnel to be trained to respond to a broad range of incidents, including deliberate releases. (Training should include exercises with deliberate release scenarios.)
- ☐ Identifies access to personnel trained to use appropriate personal protective equipment and to carry out response and clean up activities.

* The FRP, coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), provides a structure for federal assistance. For a deliberate release, the PHS within the Department of Health and Human Services (Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 - Health and Medical Services) would lead a coordinated federal effort. The Environmental Protection Agency (ESF #10 - Hazardous Materials) would assist ESF #8. Each ESF provides mechanisms for delivering federal assistance. ESF #10 integrates the efforts of the federal Regional Response Teams functioning under the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Contingency Plan (NCP).

- ☐ Identifies access to personnel familiar with risk communication techniques. (Training may be obtained from EPA and FEMA for example.)

- ☐ Identifies access to appropriate equipment to respond (e.g., special monitoring and protective equipment). (The State representative on the Regional Response Team may be able to assist in this process.)

Alert and Notification

Ensure that your plan:

- ☐ Encompasses mechanisms to identify whether a release is deliberate.

- ☐ Addresses procedures to notify the proper federal (e.g., the National Response Center), state, and local authorities.

- ☐ Outlines a mechanism to contact the Governor or other officials who might declare an emergency.

- ☐ Includes rapid notification procedures for contacting the health department, local hospitals, and other medical facilities to prepare for the possible decontamination of individuals exposed to extremely hazardous substances (some of which may be extremely uncommon) and to provide patient management services.

- ☐ Outlines procedures for rapid and continued communication with all critical parties from local fire, police, and health departments to special federal response entities.

- ☐ Addresses how to rapidly warn residents of the threat or occurrence of a deliberate release without causing undue alarm.

- ☐ Considers in place protection/evacuation procedures.

- ☐ Addresses additional security measures to be taken in and around the community at risk.

Site Emergency Procedures

Ensure that your plan:

- ☐ Provides for special security clearances for field personnel and others entering key facilities.

- ☐ Allows for periodic communication to the community on the status of the situation.

- ☐ Highlights personnel and procedures for access control, rumor control, and evacuation control.

- ☐ Provides for communication with nearby sites and facilities that may also be targets of deliberate releases.

- ☐ Provides for additional experts to remain in contact with federal and state entities, not typically involved with hazardous material response efforts, but with an informed interest in and responsibility for deliberate release scenarios (e.g., FBI).

- ☐ Identifies specific state and federal resources to be accessed.

Re-entry

Ensure that your plan:

- ☐ Identifies access to expert advice and procedures concerning decontamination techniques for clean up of uncommon extremely hazardous substances.

- ☐ Discusses the unique aspects of re-entry into the affected area, such as the possibility of additional threats or incidents.

- ☐ Outlines procedures for rapidly releasing information to the public and media regarding re-entry.

Remember that your existing emergency response plan addresses many of the issues that you will need to consider, but additional efforts now will allow you to respond immediately to the particular threats and risks involved with deliberate releases.

In the event of an intentional release of an extremely hazardous substance, contact the National Response Center.

1-800-424-8802

For additional information, contact your State Emergency Response Commission or State representative on the federal Regional Response Team.