

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

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U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
SUPERFUND AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Good morning Madame Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. I am Susan Bodine, Assistant Administrator of the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I am accompanied today by George Gray, Assistant Administrator of EPA's Office of Research and Development. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss EPA's role under the National Response Plan (NRP) and Agency efforts associated with the World Trade Center response.

EPA'S NATIONAL RESPONSE ROLE

As with other federal agencies, EPA's response pursuant to a disaster declared by the President is facilitated through the NRP. The NRP facilitates federal support to state and local governments. Under the NRP, EPA is the Coordinator and Primary Agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF) #10-Oil and Hazardous Materials Response. EPA is one of many agencies that may be activated to provide coordinated federal support during an incident, and like the other responding agencies, EPA receives mission assignments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to carry out activities in support of state and local governments.

Our primary activities under ESF #10 include: efforts to detect, identify, contain, clean up or dispose of oil or hazardous materials; removal of drums and other bulk containers; collection of household hazardous waste; monitoring of debris disposal; air and water quality monitoring and sampling; and protection of natural resources. EPA is also a support agency for a number of other Emergency Support Functions.

EPA RESPONSE AT WORLD TRADE CENTER

EPA played a key role in the nation's response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. We activated our emergency response personnel after the first plane hit the North Tower. Before we knew the tragic consequences of the attack, EPA's responders, most of whom were located in our offices in Edison, New Jersey, headed to the site. After the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers, EPA began environmental monitoring of the resulting dust and debris. EPA responded pursuant to its first mission assignment under ESF #10 on September 11, 2001. EPA tested the air in the areas surrounding the World Trade Center site, including Brooklyn and Jersey City, New Jersey. On the first day, we tested for asbestos, lead and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

As each day passed, EPA expanded its sampling program and ultimately the Agency took tens of thousands of samples of air, dust and water, which yielded close to a quarter of a million results. Levels of pollutants were sometimes elevated, particularly on the debris pile, but for the most part levels of contaminants in the ambient air outside of the immediate vicinity of the pile were not at elevated levels.

The information that EPA was giving to the public through daily interactions with the media was that workers should wear protective equipment and any person who experienced health effects should see a doctor. We shared data with reporters every day. As soon as we were able, we put our data on our Web site and made it available to the public from our offices in Lower Manhattan.

EPA also sampled drinking water from water mains in Lower Manhattan. In addition, the Agency sampled water from the Hudson and East Rivers and wastewater from a treatment plant in Brooklyn after several rainfalls to check for pollutants emanating from the World Trade Center site. While EPA detected one instance of slightly elevated PCBs in rainwater runoff at the wastewater treatment plant, ambient surface water sampling results did not indicate human health or ecological concerns.

EPA worked closely with the city to remove as much of the dust from public spaces as we could, including streets and parks. EPA even replaced sand in sandboxes. The City augmented our efforts by washing down streets, sidewalks and building exteriors. We also established worker and truck wash stations in both Lower Manhattan and on Staten Island to prevent dust from migrating from the recovery site.

When the initial phase of recovery efforts drew to an end, EPA through its Interagency Agreements with FEMA, responded to the ongoing concerns of Lower Manhattan residents with a residential indoor dust cleanup program. We consulted with city, state and other federal health and environmental officials to find a way to offer free cleaning and testing to all residents in Lower Manhattan. In developing our program,

EPA met extensively with resident and tenant organizations, environmental and community groups, community boards and many city, state, and federal elected officials to refine the clean and test program. The program was launched in June 2002, with cleaning and testing activities continuing through the following spring. In the end, more than 4,000 residences were either tested or cleaned. Of the approximately 29,000 residential air samples taken, about 0.4 percent exceeded health-based benchmarks for asbestos. The program was completed in the summer of 2003.

EPA TEST AND CLEAN PROGRAM

On December 6, 2006, EPA announced the beginning of a \$7 million, FEMA-funded program to further test indoor spaces in Lower Manhattan. Under this program, EPA has offered to test indoor spaces in Lower Manhattan in order to give information to people who have remaining concerns about possible contaminants in their indoor spaces. One challenge with such a program is that most of the contaminants that are associated with the World Trade Center dust are also found in every urban environment. EPA scientists did research to see if there is a reliable method to identify dust as being from the World Trade Center. Ultimately, after extensive peer review, EPA concluded that there is not a reliable method to definitively identify World Trade Center dust and distinguish it from other sources of such dust. In addition, the vast majority of occupied residential and commercial spaces in Lower Manhattan have been repeatedly cleaned in the more than 5 years since the terrorist attacks. However, we wanted to give people another opportunity to find out about possible contamination in their homes.

The program allows residents and building owners in Lower Manhattan to have the air and dust in their units tested for four contaminants associated with dust from the

collapse of the World Trade Center. Priority for testing is based on a property's proximity to the World Trade Center site. If analysis of dust and air samples indicates elevated levels of any of four contaminants of concern – asbestos, lead, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and man-made vitreous fibers such as fiberglass – the contaminants will be cleaned up. The registration period for this program closed on March 31, 2007. Twenty five building representatives and 272 individual residents registered for the program. Testing of interior spaces is expected to begin later this year for all registrants who have sent access agreements to EPA.

CHANGING THE ORGANIZATION TO MEET GROWING NEEDS OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Since the September 11th, 2001 attacks, the Agency has made broad, national improvements to its emergency response program. EPA took several steps to reorganize around its new emergency response and homeland security functions, including the creation of an Office of Homeland Security and the establishment of a new position of Associate Administrator for Homeland Security. Additionally, we have reorganized OSWER's emergency response functions under a single office -- the Office of Emergency Management, which focuses on emergency planning, preparedness and response. This new organization allows us to concentrate our efforts and our resources to meet the national requirements identified by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as well as our internal planning, preparedness, and response goals.

We increased our specialized, dedicated emergency response staff to improve our preparedness and response capabilities. The Agency hired 50 additional On-Scene

Coordinators specifically trained to deal with Incidents of National Significance (INS) and issues relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction. We expanded and extended the capabilities of our existing Environmental Response Team (ERT) responsible for technological support and training through the establishment of an additional ERT office in Las Vegas, NV. We established a National Decontamination Team dedicated to providing decontamination expertise related to biological, chemical, and radiological agents used as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

The National Decontamination Team is the first of its kind and provides general scientific support and technical expertise for identifying technologies and methods for decontamination of buildings, building contents, public infrastructure (including waste/drinking water plants, chemical plants, power plants, food processing facilities and subways), agriculture, and associated environmental media (air, soil and water). This special team is honing its expertise, building relationships with other agencies, and providing training to EPA responders. Most importantly, it is developing a Decontamination Portfolio which will include comprehensive analytical, sampling, and decontamination methods, as well as health and safety information for chemical, biological and radiochemical agents.

EPA's newly renovated Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is EPA's hub for emergency management communication and coordination. The EOC is capable of 24/7 operations and has its own independent computer center, backup power source and dedicated HVAC, and has a secure access facility.

Staff in the EOC provide situational awareness to EPA management during emergency responses and are the central link with regional and field response assets. The EOC is linked to many other federal operations centers including the FEMA National Response Coordination Center, DHS's Homeland Security Operations Center and the U.S. Coast Guard Command Center.

Emergency response and associated homeland security issues remain among EPA's top priorities. EPA has drafted a Homeland Security Work Plan to provide a framework for advancing the Agency to our next level of preparedness.

EPA'S NATIONAL APPROACH TO RESPONSE TARGETED IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to strengthening our organizational structure, EPA strengthened its policy as well. EPA's National Approach to Response (NAR) was established in June 2003 to complement the government-wide NRP and National Incident Management System (NIMS). This policy ensures efficient use of emergency response assets within the Agency, creates the necessary consistency across the regions, and highlights priorities for further policy development and coordination. An important facet of the NAR is the recognition that an effective response requires participation from the entire Agency, not just those offices traditionally responsible for emergency response activities. This approach initially grew out of the lessons learned during the response to the September 11th attacks, and experience (e.g. anthrax, Columbia Space Shuttle, Hurricane Katrina) continues to inform its direction.

The NAR has had a positive and tangible impact on EPA's ability to respond to an INS. In fact, as a result of these efforts, EPA responded more effectively to Hurricane Katrina, one of the largest coordinated response efforts in history. Today, I will highlight some of the actions we have taken under the NAR to improve our processes, procedures and capabilities during an INS.

EPA has made a major effort to train responders at all levels in the Incident Management System, as required under NIMS. To date, EPA has trained approximately 2000 staff in the Incident Command System (ICS) and has expanded the training program to include EPA executive leadership, and non-emergency response volunteers from across the Agency. As a result of this training, ICS is used in EPA's day-to-day response operations and was successfully used in the response to Hurricane Katrina.

EPA's resource of voluntary support personnel proved to be invaluable during our response to Hurricane Katrina when we needed to fill support roles at every level of the response on a 24/7 basis. Since the Katrina Response, EPA has made improvements to this important program. The Response Support Corps is finalizing national guidelines to facilitate consistency in its recruitment, training, and activation. The new basic training program is designed to ensure that all volunteers understand ICS structure and the expectations of a response. In addition, a national database has been developed to track the skills, experience and training of all volunteers.

EPA ensured communication with the public was one of its top priorities under the NAR. After the September 11th response, the Agency created a Crisis

Communications Workgroup with the continuing goal of providing timely, accurate and consistent information to the public at the time of a response. The Workgroup is designing several new products including a training program specific to the public information role, which is an important aspect of the ICS structure.

Incident and Data Management

EPA implemented a new information technology strategy to manage data more efficiently and consistently during a response event. This strategy was developed during the response to Hurricane Katrina, as part of an overall process to expedite the review and public posting of the results of over 400,000 laboratory analyses. EPA adapted and integrated existing Agency technology to provide interfaces that allowed the electronic flow of data from the field to the public. Data was posted promptly on the Internet for all media analyzed (floodwater, sediments, soil, surface water, air). This integrated approach is now serving as the prototype for the Emergency Management Portal currently under development to address day-to-day responses, as well as other potential INS.

Field Communications

On September 11, 2001, the ability of all agencies to respond was seriously impacted following the collapse of the World Trade Center towers as cell phones and Internet connections were damaged. Under our telecommunication priority workgroup, EPA developed standards for quality, quantity and type of communications equipment that should be available to responders in each Region. Over the last three years, EPA purchased, evaluated and installed complex technology to create a national communications network for EPA responders. Through this national approach, EPA has

amassed a pool of equipment that can be used daily in each region and shared quickly among regions during a disaster. This strategy paid off during the Katrina response when satellite dishes, radios and other communication equipment were sent from every region to assist Regions 4 and 6. As a result, EPA had data (Internet) and voice communications in areas that were otherwise disconnected for many months.

Environmental Lab Capacity

EPA recognizes that our responsibilities under homeland security require us to increase our capacity to analyze and process a large number of field samples for contaminants directly related to terrorist threats based on needs identified after the 9/11 and Capitol Hill anthrax incidents. EPA created a compendium of labs with various pre-identified capabilities that can be accessed as needed during a large scale event, and is establishing an Environmental Laboratory Response Network (eLRN) of labs capable of handling chemical, biological, and radiological agents. EPA, in conjunction with Department of Defense and DHS, developed two prototype triage facilities to handle unknown samples in order to protect laboratory staff's health and safety and laboratory assets. We are also working with DHS to expand chemical warfare agent lab capabilities in fixed laboratories and to design high capacity mobile units.

CONTRIBUTING TO FEDERAL HOMELAND SECURITY EFFORTS

EPA has a long history in emergency preparedness, planning and response. This experience allowed us to play a strong role in the development of the NRP and NIMS.

EPA continues to learn from its experiences and is working with DHS to incorporate changes as the NRP is being revised.

CLOSING

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to tell you about some of the critical steps EPA has taken to meet the needs of the public and the nation in its continued response to the September 11th attacks, and in preparation for another major incident. While the EPA represents only one part of the larger efforts occurring at the federal, state and local levels, we take our role very seriously. We can never know the exact nature or location of the next incident. The extraordinary efforts of our response staff on a daily basis, combined with EPA's NAR, allows me to say that EPA stands ready to respond wherever and whenever it is needed.