

All Events are Local - Hospital CT Preparedness

By Tony Sambol, MA, SM(NRM), Assistant Director, NPHL

“All Events are Local”- “Prepare for the Worst and Hope for the Best” – “The only thing worse than a bad plan is No plan at all”- “Practice, Practice, Practice!”

How many times have we heard these phrases in the past nine years? The world has certainly changed since the terrorist attacks that took place on the World Trade Center and Capitol Hill in 2001. In response, all state public health laboratories (SPHLs) have been working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Laboratory Response Network (LRN) since 2004 on Chemical Terrorism Preparedness efforts.

As such, all SPHLs have been charged with the responsibility of working with the stakeholders in their state to make sure that if a terrorist activity involving a chemical warfare agent took place, they would be ready to respond. The CDC LRN terms this as “CT Level-3 activities.” More applicable to Nebraska, is the possibility of a naturally occurring accident or local terrorist activity involving exposure of people to a toxic industrial chemical or toxic industrial material. Since Nebraska is a large geographical area, the NPHL began a training process in 2005 for the major hospitals in each of the 20 public health districts. To date, most public health districts now have a hospital where personnel are trained in the collection, handling, shipping, and chain-of-custody paperwork that would be necessary if specimens were to be collected for chemical analysis.

The partnership between NPHL and the hospital facility begins in earnest with a cooperative agreement to have the hospital maintain an inventory to collect 100 patient specimens. This inventory is managed with the current supplies as to not expire. NPHL provides packaging and shipping materials to each site for immediate access to ship the 100 patient specimens directly to the CDC. Test order codes are recommended in the Hospital Information System to assist nursing and phlebotomy in what specimen containers to use and what specimens to collect. This step also generates labels which are necessary for the paperwork required, such as the chain-of-custody and the shipping manifest. Most importantly, NPHL provides annual training and in the case of an event, on-site assistance.

Since training is an ongoing issue, the NPHL is planning two broadcasts this year, in May, over the Telehealth Network. This training will highlight updates and changes in the program that the NPHL started in 2005 as well as being a good review for those hospitals that have already received the training. Hospital are invited to participate in this event. The hospital CEO, head Safety Officer, ED Director and Laboratory Manager are encouraged to attend. The NPHL will be recording the broadcasts and making them available to all hospitals at a later date for those unable to attend. Announcements will be sent out as to the actual time and dates of the broadcast through a variety of means. We encourage hospitals to join us as *“All Events are Local.”*