

Terror Attacks: Are We Prepared?

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Testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is Eric Tolbert and I am the Response Division Director for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I am pleased to be here today on behalf of Secretary Tom Ridge of DHS to discuss the nation's readiness for dealing with public health response to a terrorist attack during high profile events.
Department of Homeland Security

The Department of Homeland Security consolidated 22 previously disparate agencies under one unified organization. Eighteen months ago, no single Federal department had homeland security as its primary objective. DHS now fills that role and is integrating its resources to meet a common goal. Our most important job is to protect the American people and our way of life, and we now have a single, clear line of authority to get the job done. Through our extensive partnerships with state, local and tribal governments and the private sector, as well as other Federal departments, we are working to ensure the highest level of protection, preparedness and response for the country and the citizens we serve, including people with disabilities.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 (HSPD-5) state that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security is the "principal Federal official for domestic incident management" with responsibility for "coordinating Federal operations within the United States to prepare for, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies."

DHS has been charged with ensuring the safety and security of all National Special Security Events (NSSEs). The Group of Eight Summit, the State of the Union Address, and the activities surrounding former President Ronald Reagan's Memorial Services were all designated as National Special Security Events, as are the upcoming Democratic and Republican National Conventions. The US Secret Service, also part of DHS, is in charge of the design and implementation of NSSE planning, and FEMA is responsible for incident management, and will be in charge of coordinating emergency management activities and providing any needed response and recovery assets. Planning and coordination for these events begin at least a year in advance, and FEMA's Emergency

Management Institute conducts a course specifically geared to those persons and agencies – Federal, state and local – involved in an upcoming NSSE.

In the case of the upcoming political conventions, the Department of Homeland Security has assembled numerous Federal, state and local agencies to put in place an unprecedented level of security and response assets. Working in partnership with these state and local organizations, the Department has invested substantial resources and numerous personnel to ensure a safe and secure event for the Boston and New York communities, and all delegates attending the conventions.

Among the preparedness activities of DHS agencies:

- The U.S. Secret Service has conducted comprehensive security assessments of all primary convention venues as well as hotels, hospitals, airports and other sites related to the convention. It has also coordinated multiple interagency training exercises and tested operational security plans to verify command and control protocols and procedures.
- The U. S. Secret Service has performed a tremendous amount of advance planning and coordination in the areas of venue protection, airspace security, communication, emergency equipment, credentialing and training, and began in June 2003 to develop the security plan for the Democratic National Convention to be held in July of 2004.
- Border and Transportation Security (BTS) will deploy Explosive Detector Dog teams, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)/HAZMAT technicians, intelligence and undercover agents, uniformed officers, bicycle and motorcycle officers, emergency response teams and a sizeable number of Special Agents. It will also provide Mobile Command Vehicles (MCV) to serve as highly advanced communication centers for multiple law enforcement agencies. BTS has significantly increased Federal Air Marshal coverage on scheduled airline flights to and from the greater Boston area.
- As the primary Federal maritime law enforcement agency, U. S. Coast Guard personnel will provide comprehensive waterside coverage on and over the water, coordinating closely with state, local and other Federal maritime law enforcement assets. Numerous Coast Guard units and personnel will be involved in this event including boat crews, law enforcement boarding teams, pilots and aircrew, support personnel and a wide variety of Coast Guard assets. Coast Guard helicopters will assist in security zone surveillance and enforcement as well as air interdiction efforts. The U.S. Coast Guard will establish a Waterside Security Unified Command Center to manage waterside security operations.
- Customs and Border Protection will provide officers to assist security personnel as well as operate a mobile x-ray unit to examine suspicious packages entering a Convention facility. It will also provide x-ray equipment to scan commercial vehicles and delivery trucks such as food service providers as they enter the convention sites.
- The Transportation Security Administration has conducted security and vulnerability assessments at affected commercial, general aviation and private airports as well as additional actions to enhance aviation security near convention sites.
- During the conventions, the Department's Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) will provide timely sharing of any threat information, intelligence, situational awareness and operational information pertinent to the security of the event through the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN). HSIN provides real-time connectivity and information sharing among all DHS components and state and local partners.

- For the Democratic National Convention, the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection (IAIP) Directorate is working with the State of Massachusetts Office of Public Safety to distribute radiation detection pagers to state and local law enforcement personnel with operational responsibilities for the Convention.
- In coordination with the U.S. Secret Service, the Department's Science and Technology Directorate is deploying air-monitoring equipment to detect airborne biological pathogens during the duration of the Democratic National Convention.
- The Interagency Modeling and Atmospheric Analysis Center (IMAAC) provides a single point for the coordination and dissemination of federal dispersion modeling and hazard prediction products that represent the federal position during an incident of national significance. The IMAAC is operational and prepared to provide support if it is required.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

DHS/FEMA is the lead agency responsible for coordinating emergency management activities and providing any needed response and recovery assets for the upcoming political conventions. Like numerous DHS and other Federal agencies, FEMA has been working closely with the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for quite some time in preparation for the Democratic National Convention. FEMA has also been planning for the upcoming Republican National Convention.

In preparation for the Democratic National Convention, the Boston Emergency Medical System evaluated available resources and threat information in order to be prepared to adequately respond to a mass casualty incident, including a WMD incident, occurring during the Convention, which will occur July 26-29, 2004.

FEMA maintains resources and capabilities that can be activated and deployed to support a mass-casualty incident. Due to the sensitive nature of releasing specific details for such events we are unable to do so. Resources that will be either forward deployed or standing by to respond are:

- Disaster Medical Assistance Teams
- National Medical Response Teams
- Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams
- Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams
- Burn Specialty Teams
- Medical/Surgical Response Team
- Numerous additional specialized medical personnel
- Pre-Positioned Disaster Supplies to support mass care operations
- Urban Search & Rescue task forces to support rescue operations
- Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) capabilities to support command/control/communications

DHS agencies are cooperating closely to be ready for the upcoming conventions, just as they have for past NSSEs. Beyond this, they are coordinating assets with other Federal departments, including the Department of Health and Human Services, but most

importantly, with state and local government agencies, such as police, emergency management, emergency medical services, public health, public and private hospitals, National Guard, and so on – those on the front line of emergencies.

Conclusion

The mission of DHS is very clear – helping people in need, be it a response to a terrorist attack involving a weapon of mass destruction such as a biological or chemical agent, natural disaster or any other catastrophic event. DHS provides the leadership and capabilities required to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters or emergencies of any kind. National Special Security Events present the Department an opportunity to integrate its assets and capabilities in a “real world” situation, and bring together other Federal agencies, as well as our state and local partners, who will always be the first to respond, whether the event is large or small. The complete integration of so many agencies and capabilities into one department has been a huge undertaking, but the result is a Department that is much more effective than the sum of its parts.