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For More Information contact:
Marina Voronova-Abrams
Security and Sustainability Program
Global Green USA
202-222-0702

FBI representative speaks about joint law enforcement and public health response to bioterrorism

Washington, D.C. – July 15, 2010 – On Wednesday afternoon, July 14, 2010, Global Green USA’s Security and Sustainability Program organized a discussion entitled "Joint Law Enforcement and Public Health Response to Bioterrorism." Supervisory Special Agent (SSA) Kristine A. Beardsley from the Bioterrorism Prevention Program in the FBI’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Directorate spoke about her program which coordinates the development of countermeasures, tripwire initiatives, and response policies that aim to prevent, detect, or assist in the response to a bioterrorism incident or event.

This was already the fourth meeting dedicated to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) 2010 Intersessional Topic. The 2006 Sixth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) decided to hold four sets of annual meetings, 2007-2010, prior to the 2011 Seventh Review Conference. Each set of annual meetings include a one-week Meeting of Experts, followed by a one-week Meeting of States Parties.



Marina Voronova-Abrams (left) and Kristine A. Beardsley (right)

The upcoming 2010 meetings of experts and States Parties will discuss and promote effective action on the provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations upon request by any State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons. This includes improving national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis, and public health systems.

In her Address to the Annual Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, Under Secretary of State Ellen O. Tauscher suggested that the BTWC should become the premier forum for discussion of the full range of biological threats – including bioterrorism – and mutually agreeable steps States can take for risk management. She declared that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have

developed best practices and guides on the conduct of joint criminal and epidemiological investigations of suspected intentional biological threats or incidents. The Under Secretary of State promised to bring CDC and FBI experts to share their experience in more detail at the August Experts Meeting in Geneva.



Paul F. Walker, Director of the Global Green USA Security and Sustainability Program (left), asked SSA Kristine Beardsley about FBI's cooperation with international organizations.

As an introductory note to the discussion, Ms. Marina Voronova-Abrams stressed the need for closer relationships between health and security communities in order to achieve, sustain and improve international capacity to respond to outbreaks of disease, whether deliberate or natural. She briefed the audience on current national and international efforts towards that goal. Thus, since 2005 Interpol has held regional training workshops on bioterrorism in Chile, Oman, Singapore, South Africa, Ukraine, and The Netherlands. Recently the U.S. Government assisted in organizing the Southern Caucasus Bioshield 2010 Tabletop Exercise. Some countries, including Israel, engage in regular biannual or annual biopreparedness trainings.

In her presentation SSA Beardsley defined the goals of public health and law enforcement during a large-scale biological incident, provided key elements for planning, prevention and response during such an event. She also highlighted the benefits of working in partnership and the critical elements for achieving common goals, securing dangerous pathogens, establishing information sharing protocols and procedures, and conducting joint training.



Representatives of the government agencies, foreign embassies, NGOs and academia attended the seminar.

Joint Law Enforcement and Public Health Response to Bioterrorism

Summary of the presentation by
Supervisory Special Agent (SSA) Kristine A. Beardsley
Bioterrorism Prevention Program
FBI's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Directorate

Introduction

In order to protect public health and safety by apprehending those responsible and mitigating health consequences, deliberate biological threat events require a coordinated response between law enforcement and public health. In the past, it was not uncommon for law enforcement and public health to conduct separate investigations, with limited coordination between the two disciplines. Unfortunately, the lack of coordination often limited the effectiveness of these independent, but often overlapping investigations. In order to promote collaboration between the disciplines and efforts to conduct investigations jointly, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) developed a Joint Criminal and Epidemiological Investigations Model for training public health and law enforcement personnel. Training on the Joint Investigations Model is designed to provide participants with an introduction to criminal and epidemiological investigations, enhance an appreciation of each discipline's expertise, identify potential conflicts that may be encountered between law enforcement and public health during a response, and develop solutions by using best practices when conducting joint threat assessments, investigations, and interviews.

Joint Investigations Model

The Joint Investigations Model promotes a greater understanding among law enforcement and public health personnel of respective roles, responsibilities, and information needs regarding a response to a deliberate biological threat event. Law enforcement and public health are encouraged to develop working relationships to facilitate this greater understanding and to codify the relationship in written agreements, protocols, and response plans. In practice, law enforcement is often reluctant to provide investigative information to outside agencies that may jeopardize the safety of confidential informants or may result in suspects avoiding detection. Conversely, public health may be concerned with being legally liable for the release of patient medical information without consent and maintaining the culture of ethics and trust that exists between a patient and the medical community. By promoting the development of joint investigation and information sharing protocols, these potential barriers are resolved in advance of an incident, which ensures timely information is exchanged during an actual response.



The Joint Investigations Model promotes several different methods that may be used by law enforcement and public health to improve joint responses. It begins first with encouraging law enforcement and public health to develop positive and effective working relationships. Strong professional relationships between law enforcement and public health allow for greater exchanges of information since individuals generally develop trust in their counterparts once they have met and

worked with them prior to an incident. A second method to increase the effectiveness of a joint response is to codify the relationships in a written protocol or agreement. An

agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) allows law enforcement and public health to move beyond personal contacts and formalizes the concepts and principles for conducting joint investigations of intentional biological threats. A model MOU for Joint Public Health – Law Enforcement Investigations was developed by a work group convened by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Prevention and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice (<http://www.nasemso.org/Projects/DomesticPreparedness/documents/JIMOUFinal.pdf>).

Several key concepts are outlined in the model MOU: the triggers/indicators required to initiate information exchange, procedures for conducting a threat assessment, instructions for conducting joint interviews, and protocols for information analysis and the sharing of investigative results. Finally, the Joint Investigations Model encourages the two disciplines to conduct joint interviews of patients who may have an illness as a result of a bioterrorism incident. The joint interview is a process that pairs law enforcement and public health investigators together during interviews of case patients and exposed persons. Joint interviews allow both law enforcement and public health the opportunity to evaluate the initial information collected utilizing the expertise of each investigator, which could aid in identifying the source of the infection and/or the perpetrators and/or identify needs for additional information or avenues of investigation. If interviews are conducted separately, one investigator may not recognize the importance or significance of a piece of information, which could be critical to their counterpart's investigation.

Joint Investigations Course – Domestic

Since 2004, the domestic joint investigations course has been conducted 17 times and more than 1800 students have been trained at Federal and state/local levels. It has been reported that several states/locals have used joint investigations methods to successfully respond to smaller scale intentional incidents involving biological threat agents. Additionally, course evaluations have indicated the training often has served as the first opportunity for law enforcement and public health interaction. As a result, several state/local jurisdictions have utilized the Joint Investigations Course as the foundation for developing formal information sharing agreements and joint protocols between law enforcement and public health.

Conclusions

A joint public health and law enforcement investigation improves responses to intentional biological events because it increases information exchange and mutually supports the investigative goals of both disciplines. Joint investigations training is an effective way to promote the use of joint investigations.