

Media/Public Safety Cooperative Minutes

Sept. 18, 2003

Virginia Department of Health, Roanoke office

Members Present –

Shelly Alley, Roanoke Police
JoBeth Brown, USFS
Donna Wilson, USFS
Erin Barnhart, Roanoke Sheriff's Office
Jennifer Faulker, Roanoke Fire-EMS
Lindsey Nair, Roanoke Times
Mike Stater, VDH
Dutchie Mirolli, WVTF
Ray Clark, Salem PD
Reg Gray, Salem PD
Jim Grigsby, Roanoke Fire-EMS
Tony Hershey, NRHD
Eric Earnhart, Carilion
Tom Kincaid Roanoke County Police
Judy Cusumano, VDH
David Mays, Bedford County Sheriff's Office
Joe Gaskins, Roanoke Police
Jim Day, Roanoke Police
Chuck Mason, Roanoke County PD
Rick Moorner, West Piedmont HD
Karen Saul, VDH
Dick Tabb, VDH
John O'Shea, VDH
Meg Hibbert, Salem Times Register

Introduction and welcome by Mike Stater, Regional Public Information Officer

Announcement that the first ever statewide bioterrorism drill will take place Oct. 19-22 and will include all 35 health districts in the Commonwealth. It will be conducted by the Emergency Preparedness and Response Program.

More than 40 emergency managers and more than 35 hospitals will be involved.

The objectives for the drill are as follows:

- * To provide an opportunity for discussion between health districts, response teams, local emergency managers and hospitals.
- * To clarify roles and responsibilities during a low-stress, mock event.
- * To clarify communications between all players, including the media.
- * To learn about requesting and managing the Strategic National Stockpile.
- * To make decisions about isolation and quarantine
- * To learn what facilities should be established and how patient movement will take place.

* To analyze the impact of such a disaster on daily business, schools, public safety groups, etc.

The schedule for the drill and description of what will take place on each day is as follows:

* Sunday and Monday, Oct. 19-20: Mock patients report to hospitals across the state and attempts are made to identify bioterrorism cases. Established procedures followed. Communication and decision-making are key goals.

* Tuesday, Oct. 21: Emergency management team from each district gathers by 7:55 a.m. for a briefing. Staff from all involved health districts, emergency management and hospitals take part.

* Wednesday, Oct. 22: Six dispensing sites established across the state for medications. The sites will process volunteer (mock) patients under medium stress conditions. The sites are: Salem, Abingdon, Richmond, Fairfax, Newport News and Winchester. Salem drill will take place at Salem Civic Center from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Other info:

-Roanoke Memorial Hospital will be the coordinating hospital here in the "Near Southwest" district because it is a Level One trauma center.

-It has not yet been decided what the bioterrorism agent in question will be.

-Especially important on Sunday is the testing of after hours communication.

-The Strategic National Stockpile is maintained by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security. It is a stockpile of pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies set aside in case of a large health emergency such as a bioterrorism attack. The SNS was deployed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, too. There are 12 caches that make up the SNS and they are scattered in undisclosed locations across the country.

-The first deployment of the SNS upon request is usually a "12-hour push package" consisting of general materials. Once the specific threat has been identified, a "VMI" or "Vendor Managed Inventory" is deployed to meet those specific needs. Once these packages are deployed, they are broken up and distributed to dispensing sites, where patients will receive them.

-There will likely be more of these drills, perhaps five more next year. Virginia has been chosen as the site of a national drill.

The Health Department is hoping to have hundreds of mock patients available for Wednesday's portion of the drill.

Following Mike Stater's presentation, there were a few questions from the media as to how they will be included in the drill. The Health Department will practice coming up with a press release but will not actually send it out to media outlets. In the future, there may be more media involvement in the drills.

No one expressed concerns about any recent incidents. Erin Barnhart said she will check with Sheriff McMillan to see if the department can host the next Co-op meeting. The topic would likely be jail security.

Stay tuned...