CHARGE TO REVIEWERS: EMERGENCY RESPONDER HEALTH MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is conducting a peer review of the scientific information product, "Emergency Responder Health Monitoring and Surveillance." This document has been determined by the Institute to be an Influential Scientific Assessment according to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines issued pursuant to Section 515 of Public Law 106-554, commonly known as the "Data Quality Act" (codified at 44 USC 3504(d)(1) and 3516). The overall goal of the peer review is to enhance the quality and credibility of Agency recommendations by ensuring that the scientific and technical work products underlying these recommendations receive appropriate levels of peer review by independent scientific and technical experts. This charge to the reviewers was developed in accordance with NIOSH's established peer review guidelines and policies and is meant to ensure that the Agency uses credible and appropriate science in the development of its worker protection recommendations for emergency response.

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide a recommended safety and health monitoring and surveillance framework for emergency responders, referred to in the document as the "Emergency Responder Health Monitoring and Surveillance (ERHMS)" system. This document includes specific recommendations and tools for all phases of an emergency response, including the pre-deployment, during-deployment, and post-deployment phases. The overall intent of the ERHMS system is to ensure that properly trained and medically screened responders are deployed to each emergency response, to identify exposures, illnesses, and injuries early in the course of an emergency response in order to prevent or mitigate adverse physical and psychological effects among responders, and then to determine whether long term post-event surveillance is warranted. The document provides comprehensive guidance in the following areas: (1) medical screening that focuses on assessment of fitness and ability to safely and effectively deploy on a response, (2) responder training regarding hazards to be anticipated and protective measures to mitigate them, (3) approaches to centralized tracking or rostering of responders, (4) surveillance and monitoring for exposures and adverse health effects, including supporting efforts in environmental monitoring and assessment, (5) out-processing assessments on completion of response duties and deployments, and (6) follow-up or long-term surveillance or monitoring for potential delayed or long-term adverse effects of the deployment experience.

In response to reviewers' comments, NIOSH will develop a Peer Review Report, posted to the NIOSH public docket, that will contain the resolution to the comments. While the names and affiliations of the peer review panel will be made available, along with a

description of their credentials and relevant experience, the individual comments will not be attributed to any specific reviewers.

Background:

Previous emergency events have demonstrated that, despite good intentions and sincere efforts, significant gaps and deficiencies continue to exist in health monitoring and worker safety and health surveillance afforded to emergency response workers (including police, fire, and emergency medical personnel, as well as other responder groups such as public health personnel, cleanup, and repair/restoration/recovery workers). These gaps and deficiencies were documented in the Rand reports prepared following the World Trade Center response, but these problems have persisted and, despite improvements, were observed again in the response to Hurricane Katrina and, even more recently, in the response to the massive Deepwater Horizon response in the Gulf of Mexico.

The persistence of these gaps and deficiencies in emergency responder health monitoring and surveillance, despite considerable attempts to anticipate and correct them, emphasizes that there remains a need for a coherent, comprehensive approach to protecting these groups of workers and a need for detailed, practical guidance in how to implement such an approach.

The draft guidance was developed through an interagency work group representing federal agencies, state health departments, and volunteer organizations whose common goal was to develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to ensuring the safety and health of emergency responders. While the work group was convened and led by NIOSH, the draft manuscript is intended as a future submission to the National Response Team, Worker Safety and Health Sub-Committee Review Board for consideration as an interagency resource document. In addition to this peer review, NIOSH will present this draft document to the public to receive input prior to submission for National Response Team approval.

Questions for Peer Reviewers:

To facilitate review of the draft Emergency Responder Health Monitoring and Surveillance document, please address the five questions shown below. The charge to the Peer Reviewers is to objectively review the guidance document to determine whether the information contained in the document is clearly described; the recommended approaches would likely protect or improve responder health; the guidance is organized and presented in a logical and useful manner; and the recommendations are practical and implementable.

1. Are the recommendations described in the draft document clearly described and justified with sufficient context and background information?

2. Will the recommendations, if implemented as presented in the draft, likely protect and/or improve responders' safety and health?

3. Is the guidance organized in a logical and useful manner? Would companion documents, such as an electronic version or training materials, be helpful?

4. Are the recommendations practical and implementable? Are the recommendations sufficiently flexible to allow scalability for different sizes of events and different sizes of response organizations?

5. Is there anything missing that should be added to make this document complete? Such as checklists, surveys, and templates in the Tools Section.

Time Frame for Review:

The Peer Reviewers will develop individual reports that should be sent to John Halpin, MD, MPH, CDC/NIOSH 1600 Clifton Rd, Mail Stop E20, Atlanta, GA 30333 or electronically via e-mail to jhalpin@cdc.gov. Reports are expected to be received by NIOSH by March 15, 2011. All electronic comments should be formatted in Microsoft Word.

NIOSH will then consider and respond to the comments received and issue a revised draft document for presentation to the National Response Team.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the peer review of this important document. Your comments will help improve this draft guidance and protect the safety and health of emergency responders.