

NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR TERRORISM PREPAREDNESS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

The critical importance of links between business and public health was observed in the aftermath of the fall 2001 terrorism acts. Several problems were revealed in the wake of those events, including the following:

- Almost all the incidents occurred in the workplace, highlighting the workplace risks for the approximately 48% of Americans who are employed.
- The businesses directly affected by these incidents expressed a clear need for information and assistance to take appropriate action.
- The majority of businesses are not linked to their appropriate public health systems.
- The business sector has a wide array of valuable resources that can be shared with the public health system during urgent-need emergency responses.

Therefore, the real and functional links between employers and public health are being developed and strengthened as part of our nation's overall terrorism-preparedness planning.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

To ensure sufficient collaboration between private sector entities within the business community and state and local public health systems, CDC is implementing a cooperative agreement with the National Business Group on Health (NBGH) on two related projects: first, to identify and make recommendations regarding gaps in planning and coordination between the business and public health communities, and second, to collect information and advice from business and public health leaders about steps businesses can take to prepare for, and respond to, a terrorism event. This information will be summarized in a terrorism-preparedness checklist for businesses.

To date, NBGH has worked with CDC, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, and the National Association of City and County Health Officials to identify and complete interviews with representatives from the business and public health sector, including organizations that were directly involved with the response to the terrorism events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent anthrax attacks. These interviews have identified gaps in coordination between the business and public health sectors, and each group has made recommendations to address these gaps. Additionally, a business workgroup has been formed and is providing guidance regarding project activities.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC and NBGH, along with the business workgroup, will be pilot-testing the preparedness checklist during project activities in 2004 and will subsequently disseminate their findings. These efforts will strengthen community-level coordination for terrorism preparedness, emergency response, and other urgent health events.