NATIONAL PERSONAL PROTECTIVE TECHNOLOGY LABORATORY

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- The Institute of Medicine has identified a critical need for improved personal protective equipment and called for increased research to test commercial products, develop more protective respirators, develop better protective suits, and establish uniform testing standards and guidelines for personal protective equipment use in hospitals.
- Congress has encouraged research, testing, and related activities aimed at protecting workers who respond to public health needs in the event of a terrorist incident.
- In addition, technologies and standards for personal protective equipment that can protect against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism agents must be developed.

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

In FY2001, Congress allocated funds to support the long-term development of standards and technologies for protecting the health and safety of America's workers who rely on personal protective equipment (e.g., respirators, clothing, gloves, hard hats, and eye and hearing protective devices); these workers include miners, fire fighters and other emergency responders, health care workers, agricultural workers, and industrial workers. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) established the National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory (NPPTL) (www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl) at its Pittsburgh site to provide national and world leadership for prevention of occupational disease, injury, and death for workers who rely on personal protective technologies. NPPTL also will examine detectors, sensors, and displays for monitoring personal exposures.

Example of program in action: Through NPPTL, NIOSH has developed certification standards for respirators effective in protecting emergency responders and other workers from chemical and biological terrorism threats. In December 2001, NIOSH published respirator certification standards for the self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) used by most emergency responders to ensure that such equipment will effectively protect against CBRN hazards. The first CBRN SCBA approval was issued on May 31, 2002.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

NPPTL will complete the development of particulate, supplied-air, and gas and vapor laboratories; continue to develop CBRN agent standards for other classes of respirators; and work closely with all stakeholders to define new programs and enhance existing ones through partnership, research, service, and communication.

For additional information on this and other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh. *March 2003*