Chemical Terrorism:

We're Not Ready

Unmet Needs

- Fully fund all 10 Level 1 chemical terrorism laboratories through CDC in order to ensure our nation's ability to respond to a large-scale chemical incident.
- Provide $10 million to add five Level 1 chemical terrorism laboratories to comply with the recommendation of the federal Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks.
- Direct CDC to include the need for dedicated Level 1 funding in their guidance to states.
- Support the transfer of CDC's Rapid Toxic Screen to state public health laboratories in order to improve their ability to measure 150 military chemical weapons agents in human tissue.

PREPAREDNESS

(Dollars in millions)

FY 2007 $823 (Enacted)

FY 2008 $823 (President's Request)

FY 2008 $919 (APHL Required Amount)

(+$20 million for Water Security Initiative)

Background

During a chemical event, such as the sarin gas release in Tokyo, the train derailment in South Carolina or the planned cyanide attacks on the New York subway, our citizens need to know that the government is prepared to respond.

Public health and environmental laboratories comprise the backbone of the nation's system for identifying, testing and characterizing potential agents of chemical terrorism. Preparedness at this level continues to lag behind other preparedness activities.

- Few state public health laboratories are able to test clinical samples for chemical warfare substances, such as nerve agents.
- Even fewer state laboratories are able to test soil, water or air samples for chemical warfare substances. Even if states possess the proper equipment, no federal agencies currently provide training for such testing.
- Little effort has been made to develop standards and methods for the analysis of chemical terrorism agents in environmental samples. This ensures that laboratories are using reliable and valid methods that will yield results that are comparable.
- Sixteen states (31 percent of those sampled) do not have a written response plan for a chemical terrorism attack or widespread chemical contamination. Fourteen states (27 percent) have only an informal plan. Funding is needed to increase states' capacity to develop and formalize such plans.

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Chemical Laboratory Response Network

The Chemical Laboratory Response Network is a nationwide network of federal, state and local laboratories capable of confirming the presence of chemical terrorism agents in human blood and urine. Of the three tiers of laboratory members, Level 1 laboratories are the top, since they are capable of detecting an expanded number of chemical agents.

Studies by the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks have shown that our nation needs at least 10 Level 1 Chemical Terrorism Laboratories in order to handle the surge anticipated during a chemical event of national significance. Only five such laboratories are currently funded. An additional $10 million is needed to fund the additional five labs. Furthermore, CDC needs to include the need for dedicated Level 1 funding in their guidance. Otherwise, this money will be re-directed to other preparedness activities.

Because the initial response to any emergency is local, state laboratories need to be capable of testing samples for chemical agents. The local jurisdictions need to decide their own priorities while receiving support from CDC.

Environmental Laboratory Response Network

The Environmental Laboratory Response Network will work to improve the nation's ability to quickly analyze large numbers of environmental samples for chemical, biological and radiological contaminants during an incident of national significance. Sustained funding is needed to support this program.

At least 37 state public health laboratories report that they do not perform testing for chemical warfare agents such as vesicant, choking and nerve agents in environmental samples. In fact, during a recent exercise, federal officials asked a state laboratory director what chemical warfare capabilities she possessed. She said none and asked them what capabilities they had. They said none.