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The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) Bioterrorism Response Laboratory has been funded by the CDC Public Health Preparedness and Emergency Response for Bioterrorism Cooperative Agreement for the past ten years. This funding has helped laboratory staff—even though it has been reduced considerably over the past couple of years—continue to provide annual training and exercises to state partners.

### Funding Highlights

These activities include annual first responder training, functional drills with the 32 sentinel laboratories, and an annual conference on hospital and clinical laboratory preparedness. The funding of staff has also helped the BT Laboratory to continue to provide 24/7 support to law enforcement partners (FBI and the State Police Emergency Services Unit). To date, the lab has processed over 3,000 samples, mostly environmental samples including those involved in the anthrax attacks of 2001 and a naturally-occurring event in Danbury, CT, in 2007 involving a drum maker and his son. As demonstrated in 2001 and 2007, one case of anthrax can have tremendous implications and involves an enormous amount of work, planning and coordination, among many state and federal agencies, including the DPH Bioterrorism Response Laboratory. This work continues beyond initial identification of *B. anthracis*, and often involves

a significant amount of effort during remediation. Continued funding is not optional, but for all of the reasons mentioned here, essential.

### Training

The highlights of the past ten years with regard to training have been the nine annual first responder trainings offered in Connecticut and the continual packaging and shipping of infectious substances training to hospital and public health laboratory personnel. The first responder training has proven to be useful to respond to all types of events in the state. Over the years, this training has been offered in conjunction with partners from the FBI, Connecticut State Police, and the 14th Civil Support Team. The purpose of these conferences is to train first responders in the safe and effective response to terrorist events and to identify the roles of the various partners and other potential resources.

The subject matter varies from year to year and has included radiological events, chemical events (both intentional and non-intentional), dirty bombs and biological events. These trainings have grown over the years starting with around 100 attendees to at least 200 attendees and sometimes even having to turn people away.

## Infectious Substances

The personnel funded through the Public Health Emergency Preparedness grant perform numerous essential functions in addition to their emergency preparedness duties. For example, in Connecticut, preparedness staff members offer training and certification to local public health and hospital personnel on packaging and shipping infectious substances, which often have to be shipped between facilities in order to conduct confirmatory testing. Infectious substances are separated into two categories: Category A which are extremely dangerous/lethal agents such as *Bacillus anthracis*, *Yersinia pestis*, *Francisella tularensis*, and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, and Category B which are less likely to cause serious physical injury or death. Federal statutes require that anyone offering infectious substances for shipment be trained and certified in packaging the material in a safe and effective manner.

Years ago, the director of the Connecticut Public Health Laboratory recognized that laboratorians and public health personnel throughout the state were lacking in the training and certification for shipping infectious substances. Due to the fact that many of the Category A agents are possible weapons of mass destruction and, therefore, pose an emergency preparedness threat, the decision was made to have grant personnel offer packaging and shipping training throughout the state.

## Packaging and Shipping Courses

The Connecticut Public Health Laboratory teamed with personnel from Hartford Hospital to conduct training seminars entitled “Packaging and Shipping Infectious Substances Category A and B.” The training updates individuals on the regulations issued by the Federal Department of Transportation and the International Air Transport Association

governing the shipping of infectious substances. Since 2003, the seminars have been held throughout the state on approximately 90 occasions. Over 900 laboratorians from hospital laboratories and local public health departments attended the training. Upon completion, participants received certification allowing them to legally ship infectious substances. The feedback from the course has been extremely positive and requests were received for additional classes.

In addition to ensuring the safety of extremely dangerous infectious substances during transport, the training boasts other ancillary benefits.

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Provided at little or no cost to the local public health departments and hospitals, the classes foster interaction and relationship-building between the emergency preparedness personnel and the local public health and hospital staff members. One private shipping company offers the training at a cost of \$695.00 per student. The training has been furnished free of charge in Connecticut to over 900 personnel, and the savings to local public health and hospitals is substantial.

Any additional reduction in funding for staffing could seriously impact any or all of these ongoing activities. It would be very unfortunate to have to discontinue any of these valuable trainings which have already proven their worth in successful responses to some very unusual and difficult events. Currently, the lab has fewer staff than in 2007; so in reality, response capability and training efforts have already been impacted.

## Contact

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