

Director's Update

By Mike Harryman, Director of Emergency Operations

Last month Deputy Director Jean O'Connor, D.P.H., announced the new goals and priorities for the Public Health Division to make Oregon one of the healthiest states in the U.S. and make Oregon's public health system into a national model of excellence.



In addition to focusing on public health prevention programs, community resilience to emergencies is a key priority for the division. The Public Health Division's Health Security, Preparedness and Response program is working with the counties to ensure that all communities are able to respond and recover quickly from public health emergencies. I'd like to share three examples of how we're developing community resilience.

First, a critical component for community resilience is the sustainability of medical volunteer programs. Through SERV-OR and county based Medical Reserve Corps units, Oregon has over 750 medical volunteers who are trained and ready to assist during an emergency. When not helping with emergencies, the medical volunteers train with county health departments through vaccination clinics.

Another critical component for community resilience is the continued work with our state and county partners through the Oregon Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Program, which delivers critical medical assets to the scene of an emergency. The SNS Program is reviewed annually by the CDC's Division of Strategic National Stockpile (DSNS) to measure its planning and response capabilities. This year the program received a 98 percent grade, up from 92 percent last year, on its overall readiness to respond to an all-hazard event. There are only three other programs in the United States that were ranked higher (New York, N.Y.; Albany / Schenectady / Troy, N.Y.; and Chicago, Ill.). This high score is a testament to the support we received from our emergency preparedness partners.

Finally, our partnerships with county health departments, Oregon tribes and healthcare partners continue to build resiliency across the state. Effective July 1, 2012, our two federal cooperative agreements will be aligned. What this means is our focus and energy will be working with our partners on the following critical capabilities: community and healthcare resiliency, public information and warning, emergency operations, information sharing, medical surge, and surveillance and lab operations. Both PHEP and HPP funding will provide the firm foundations to help us achieve these goals and objectives.

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Oregon counties earn national recognition for public health preparedness efforts

Washington County Health and Human Services and North Central Public Health District receive awards

By Lynda Neal



Washington County Health and Human Services and the North Central Public Health District recently met comprehensive preparedness benchmarks required by Project Public Health Ready (PPHR), a unique partnership between the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"We are proud to have been recognized by Project Public Health Ready for our high level of preparedness," said Teri Thalhofer, director of the North Central Public Health District. "We will continue to work with our preparedness partners to quickly and effectively respond to any public health crisis in Wasco, Sherman, or Gilliam counties."

Local health departments recognized by PPHR undergo a thorough evaluation process by a national peer review. They must meet expectations in public health preparedness in three key areas: preparedness planning, work force competency, and demonstration of all-hazards readiness through exercises or a response to a real event.

"It was a rigorous process, but we are better prepared having gone through the intensive evaluation," said Sue Mohnkern, Washington County Health and Human Services Public Health Emergency Preparedness supervisor.

Inspired by the success of these two health departments, Multnomah County recently submitted its application for PPHR recognition.

"We learned a great deal from the agencies that successfully went before us," said Jim Spitzer, Emergency Preparedness manager, Multnomah County Health Department. "The Health Security, Preparedness, and Response staff that assisted us with our application were an invaluable resource and we couldn't have done it without their expertise."

Local health departments interested in applying for PPHR recognition can contact their state Public Health liaison or Lynda Neal, PPHR lead for Oregon, at 971-673-0570, or lynda.neal@state.or.us.

Oregon SNS Program receives 98% hazard readiness score

By Holly Groom and Sonya Czerniak

The mission of the Oregon Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Program is to deliver critical medical assets to the scene of an emergency. The SNS Program is reviewed annually by the CDC's Division of Strategic National Stockpile (DSNS) to measure its planning and response capabilities. This year the program received a 98 percent grade, up from 92 percent last year, on its overall readiness to respond to an all-hazard event.



Thanks to the strength of the SNS Program's partners and to Health Security, Preparedness, and Response (HSPR) program support, the Oregon SNS continues to improve and rank among the highest performing SNS programs in the country.

Even with this achievement, the program is continuing to build on lessons learned, and meets regularly with its partners to review the Oregon SNS Plan. This year, several new state partnerships have paved the way for expanding the response demographics of the SNS. These partnerships will allow for improved resource allocation for those areas in the state that are more difficult to reach, and a decrease in overall response time. A shorter response time will lead to swifter care for affected families and individuals in distress, in keeping with the SNS mission to deliver critical medical assets to all Oregonians in need of help.

In the next year, the program is focused on training and exercising to strengthen its response to emergency events. With coordination of the Oregon Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) program, Oregon will conduct a full scale exercise in spring 2013. The exercise is intended to increase SNS response capabilities while building on existing state partnerships within the program. While still in the early stages of planning, the program plans to exercise receiving, allocating, and distributing medical assets, followed by a thorough evaluation process. A full-scale exercise is the best way to evaluate and improve on our program's capacity and readiness for response.

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CSEPP completes its mission, closes

By Dean Marcum

On May 14, the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) at the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Eastern Oregon completed its eight-year incineration of 7.4 million pounds of chemical munitions, including nerve and blister agent. CSEPP is a partnership between the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Department of the Army, working to eliminate all aging chemical munitions and warfare materials, in accordance with international treaties and national policy.



Since 2004, local communities have enjoyed steady employment because of the burn. More than 1,000 jobs were created for this particular project, including first responders from police, fire, EMS, and hospital staff; all were trained and furnished with specialized chemical equipment to protect them in case of an accidental release. Unfortunately, due to the closure, employees will either have to relocate to another CSEPP site, retire, or pursue other jobs.

The equipment, however, will remain in use. Chemical suits and respirators have been given to FEMA Region 10, local hospitals, and other entities. A decontamination trailer has gone to Mercy Medical Center in Roseburg, public warning system equipment has been sent to coastal communities, and a 450 megahertz radio has been retained by Umatilla and Morrow counties for their newly-formed radio communications district.

The 20,000-acre Umatilla Chemical Depot property will be divided for use by the Oregon National Guard, industrial and agriculture businesses; the remainder will be designated as a natural wildlife habitat area. All structures, except for the incineration facility, will be left there for new agencies to use.

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MRC plays integral role at vigilant guard exercise

By Teddy Solberg

On May 3, the final day of a three-day Vigilant Guard statewide exercise, a handful of MRC volunteers joined the Oregon National Guard, Lane County Fire Department, and other public safety agencies at the Eugene Airport to practice and improve patient tracking during a disaster.



More than 130 Guard members volunteered as mock victims, assuming roles as injured civilians in a stadium collapse scenario. The emergency service organizations worked together to successfully triage, transport, and track these victims.

“The important thing is cooperation between some really very different organizations, and being able to integrate together, to account for everybody, and to use your resources in the best possible way so you can do the most with as little as you have,” said Peggy Pierson, logistics chief for the Oregon Disaster Medical Team. “This exercise builds relationships, and one day this will pay off in a very big way for us.”

The exercise originally called for patients to be loaded onto C130 military aircraft scheduled to land during the simulation, but, unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate. Pierson, however, embraced the less-than-perfect conditions.

“This is like what happens in a real disaster. Plans change, and you have to be flexible, and it means you have to be able to manage your patients in the interim, until the transportation arrives. It’s a good thing.”

The Vigilant Guard, a major national emergency exercise put on by the U.S. Northern Command, organized the three-day event. The first day simulated a tornado touchdown in southeast Salem, and the second featured Blackhawk helicopters evacuating patients from the University of Oregon campus.

Susan Aarseth, Clackamas County MRC volunteer and a 30-year occupational health nurse, participated in the last two days of the event. She was particularly active during the stadium collapse simulation.

“I evaluated victims, and got them transported off-site. I also went on a reconnaissance to get patients, where I did casualty evaluations and sent them back to the hospital waiting area to be treated and sent away,” said Aarseth. “This has been an eye-opening event, and it’s the right thing to do. I think it’s very important for the communications to all come together during a large-scale disaster.”

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