

Second Meeting
Geneva, 6-10 December 2004

Meeting of Experts
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Item 5 and 6 of the agenda

Mitigation of Intentional Outbreaks of Human Disease

Submitted by Australia

I Introduction

1. Generally, in Australia, an all hazards, all-agency approach is taken towards emergency management: that is, one plan coordinating all agencies is used to cover all hazards. The fundamental principles outlined in Australia's Disaster Plan (DISPLAN) are then incorporated into each agency response plan. In some special cases or situations, the plan is further refined to deal with particular issues e.g. maritime, airport or HAZMAT incidents.
2. To this end, the organisation Emergency Management Australia (EMA) has been established to ensure effective response to national emergencies and disasters in Australia, and brings together the resources of the Federal Government, States and Territories.
3. Emergency plans describe the community's pre-emergency preparedness, the issues of local responsibility and jurisdiction, scene control, medical control, resource availability, and the interrelationship between the hazardous materials emergency activities of each participant in the plan. Legislative authority is derived from State and Territory Acts dealing with emergency responses and are detailed in DISPLANs.
4. A first step in establishing effective emergency or disaster management arrangements is to identify natural and human-made hazards which may affect the community or nation. Identified hazards must be evaluated in a structured way and appropriate responses developed, implemented, tested and reviewed. Hazard analysis will involve measuring or estimating the likelihood of an event taking place and the possible consequences of each event. Once hazard analysis programs have been put in place, arrangements to deal with the more likely or high consequence threats can be designed using the following broad principles.

5. In this context, disaster management covers much more than the threat from biologicals, but the general principles still apply, although supplemented by detailed, specialist plans to deal with the specific hazards of such cases.

II Six principles of emergency management

Organisation

6. Effective emergency (disaster) management must be supported by an organisation and organisational framework in which to operate. This is required to establish functional responsibilities for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Prevention and recovery will be the responsibility of many government departments, each having a small role. It is necessary to set up standing interdepartmental arrangements for co-ordination of effort. Preparedness and response activities are usually more homogeneous, although the need for interdepartmental and inter-agency arrangements to support planning, control, co-ordination and resource management is just as important. The emergency (disaster) management organisation should be established in legislation and interdepartmental plans.

Command and Control

7. Prior to an emergency or disaster, the responsibility for overall control of the situation and for the command of each organisational element involved will need to be clearly specified in either legislation or the emergency (disaster) plan. It cannot be left to chance. Nor can decisions on these issues be left until an emergency or disaster occurs.

Coordination of Support

8. The authority and responsibility for assembling resources to support any counter disaster operation will need to be specified in the disaster plan. Most problems of dealing with emergencies and disasters in Australia centre around resource management issues, and relate more to coordinating what is available, than to the lack of resources.

Information Management

9. Effective management of information is essential to deal successfully with emergencies and disasters. Communication networks will be needed between organisations and agencies to ensure that preparedness measures and response operations can be properly coordinated. There is also a requirement for community information, which covers prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. People must be aware of hazards they face and how to avoid them, or reduce their effects. They need to be aware of emergency/disaster management arrangements in their local area and when a threat emerges they must be warned of it and advised what to do prior to and post-impact.

Timely Activation

10. If responses are to be timely, activation of plans should be independent of declarations of states of emergency or disaster. Authority to activate part or all of the plan should be vested in an appropriate authority, preferably the designated controller.

Effective Emergency (Disaster) Management Plan

11. This plan is the outcome of arrangements made, and agreements reached, as a result of the application of sound, agreed concepts and principles. It is a formal record of those arrangements and agreements. To be effective it must be written, simple, properly disseminated and regularly tested and revised.

III Biological incidents

12. The pattern of occurrence of illness arising from a biological agent attack is entirely different from a naturally occurring illness. Such patterns may be expressed mathematically and detected by computer after appropriate data processing or other analytical techniques. Public health units provide routine information on notifiable illnesses. This data is shared within, *inter alia*, the Public Health Laboratory Network for analysis and reporting. Such information provides the primary alert network for illness which is the result of a biological agents, leading to at 'attack' alert.

13. An examination of CBR incidents (for example the Tokyo subway incident, March 1995) shows a significant number of casualties among response agency staff indicating that, in the past, proper procedures may either not have been followed or not put in place. It is important responsible authorities act on lessons learnt.

14. Specifically for biological threats, the emergency management plan identifies all likely agents, sources, transport mechanisms, symptoms and the appropriate response that is required. The response recognises that there is only a limited range of vaccines and toxoids available to counter biological agents. Management strategies include quarantine, broad spectrum drug treatment, supportive care and communication (to allay panic).

15. Great care must be taken when using laboratory services to ensure that the problem is correctly diagnosed and not compounded. Sample collection must be done strictly in accordance with guidelines; a chain of custody must be established; labelling, handling and shipment (transport) rules must be implemented rigorously. It is imperative that rules and regulations covering these matters are developed and incorporated into emergency plans.

IV Summary

16. Disaster or emergency planning is demanding, time consuming and resource intensive. But without it we are doomed to certain failure. It is an essential element of modern government.

This short summary is designed to highlight Australia's overall emergency management processes and draw your attention to the wealth of resources that are available to all delegations on-line. Obviously hard copies of all relevant documentation can be obtained in hard copy from EMA, if internet access is not readily available.

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Full details and comprehensive manuals may be found at the EMA web site

www.ema.gov.au/publications
