

RELATED TERMS

- Quarantine
- Equipment
- Pre-Planning



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

LESSON LEARNED

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Fire
- Law Enforcement
- Emergency Management
- HazMat

Field Decontamination: Shielding Activities from the Media

SUMMARY

Hazardous materials (HazMat) teams should use tents or screens to preserve the privacy of individuals undergoing field decontamination. Additionally, emergency response plans should consider establishing a media area at a distance where they cannot record field decontamination activities.

DESCRIPTION

On April 24, 1997, a suspicious package was discovered in the Washington, DC offices of B'nai B'rith. It contained a Petri dish labeled *Anthraxis Yersinia*, a misspelled combination of the words anthrax and yersinia, leading a building security guard to suspect it was a biological agent. The District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (DCFEMS) was first to respond to the scene. Incident command (IC) decided to shelter-in-place building occupants. Shortly thereafter, several building occupants complained of dizziness and headaches, leading IC to suspect the presence of a chemical agent.

After consulting with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a DCFEMS HazMat Task Force team erected a decontamination corridor on the street in front of the B'nai B'rith building, in plain view of news media. News cameras on the street and on neighboring building rooftops recorded building occupants and emergency responders as they disrobed and walked through the decontamination corridor. Several Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers, aware of the cameras, refused to disrobe and undergo decontamination. One officer struck a HazMat Task Force member while attempting to escape forced decontamination. Senior level MPD officials were asked to order the officers to comply with the procedures, which they eventually did.

When developing decontamination operations plans, HazMat teams should be sensitive to concerns persons may have about disrobing in public. HazMat teams should use tents or screens that will shield persons undergoing field decontamination from public viewing. Additionally, emergency response plans should consider keeping the media at a distance to protect the physical privacy of individuals.

CITATION

- US Fire Administration. *Fire Department Response to Biological Threat at B'nai B'rith Headquarters, Washington, DC*. April 1997. ([LLIS.gov ID# 158](#))

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email Feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.