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LESSON LEARNED

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Hospital Emergency Planning: Cordoning Off Selected Areas to Prevent the Spread of Contamination

SUMMARY

Healthcare facility planners should develop procedures to cordon off selected areas that could become contaminated after a radiological release incident. This can help hospital personnel limit the spread of contamination by managing the movement of potentially contaminated victims.

DESCRIPTION

On September 17, 2005, the State of Oregon conducted the State of Oregon Hood River County functional exercise (FE). This exercise simulated the detonation of a radiological improvised explosive device (IED) near Hood River City, Oregon. This FE provided participating agencies with the opportunity to improve essential tactical skills, coordination, and communication when responding to a radiological IED incident. One hundred representatives from twenty-one federal, state, local, and private sector agencies participated in this exercise. According to this FE scenario, the IED's debris contaminated a large area around the immediate blast site. A number of local residents also became contaminated while assisting some of the injured contaminated victims after the explosion. The incident commander alerted the local hospital that many people may have been contaminated as soon as the radiological release was detected.

Hospital personnel established a decontamination center outside the hospital's emergency room to manage the influx of victims and to control the spread of contamination. However, they did not cordon off areas inside and outside the hospital and did not establish monitored routes for incoming victims. As a result, during the FE, some victims transited through the main entrance of the emergency department as well as other areas of the hospital. These activities increased the risk of contamination to otherwise uncontaminated patients, hospital personnel, areas, and equipment. The Hood River Functional Exercise After-Action Report concluded that hospital personnel would have been required to quickly identify a new emergency department entrance in the event that the main entrance became contaminated.

Healthcare facility planners should develop procedures to cordon off selected areas that could become contaminated after a radiological release incident. This can help hospital personnel limit the spread of contamination by managing the movement of potentially contaminated victims.

CITATION

Department of Homeland Security. *Oregon State Domestic Preparedness: Hood River County Functional Exercise After-Action Report*. 17 Sep 2005.

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