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LESSON LEARNED

Emergency Planning: Developing Triggers for Activating Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plans

SUMMARY

State and local health officials should consider developing triggers for activating the statewide burn disaster response plan. This can streamline the decision process for activating the state burn plan.

DESCRIPTION

The US Department of Health and Human Services sponsored and conducted the New York Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plan Tabletop Exercise (TTX) in conjunction with the New York State Department of Health, Health Emergency Preparedness Program, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program in Brooklyn, New York, on January 29, 2009. Personnel from 23 state, local, and private sector health organizations and hospitals participated in the TTX. The TTX was conducted in two sessions, one for the New York City participants and another for upstate New York participants.

TTX goals included the assessment, review, and validation of key concepts and capabilities outlined in the New York Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plan. The TTX tested the statewide medical surge and communications capabilities in response to an incident involving a large number of burn victims in upstate New York and New York City. The upstate New York exercise scenario simulated a fire in the Finger Lakes area that resulted in 300 victims, of which 50 experienced significant burns. The New York City exercise scenario simulated 400 victims, of which 100 experienced significant burns, after a large fire at a nightclub in New York City's East Village.

Upstate New York TTX participants noted that a large-scale fire may require state and local incident commanders to activate the statewide burn plan. However, incident commanders may not have time to fully review the health emergency response data system or to communicate with all the burn centers in the state. Participants observed that comprehensive information gathering from multiple sources could waste valuable time, particularly if there is poor or unclear communication during the initial stages of the incident. Incident commanders will be "fighting the clock;" consequently, a definitive numerical trigger could expedite the process to activate the statewide burn plan.

New York City participants agreed that a casualty number could serve as a guideline to activate the burn plan. However, they added that activation should also depend on an incident commander's situational awareness. For example, an incident commander should consider activating the Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plan for fewer burn victims if there is an inadequate number of available burn beds in hospitals. The after-action report recommends that the Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plan should be revised to include a

threshold of 3 to 5 patients as an initial trigger for plan activation in upstate New York, whereas the New York City Annex of the Plan should use 75 patients as a guideline for plan activation.

State and local health officials should consider developing triggers for activating the statewide burn disaster response plan. This can streamline the decision process for activating the state burn plan.

CITATION

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *New York Statewide Burn Disaster Response Plan Tabletop Exercise After Action Report*. 18 May 2009.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=41326>

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