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## LESSON LEARNED

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### Incident Management: Notifying Local Officials During State-Led Response Operations

#### SUMMARY

State emergency managers should ensure that local officials, including emergency management and response personnel, are notified of ongoing operations, potential threats, and changes in incident conditions during state-led response operations. This can help local agencies and organizations plan and conduct operations effectively after an incident.

#### DESCRIPTION

On December 24, 2009, Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) medical personnel diagnosed a 24-year-old female patient with gastrointestinal anthrax. Several weeks prior to the onset of symptoms, the patient had participated in a "drumming circle" in Durham, New Hampshire. A total of 72 people had attended the 2-hour drumming event at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) United Campus Ministry (UCM) community center. During the event, participants had played 59 drums and inadvertently caused anthrax spores on some animal-hide drums to aerosolize. The patient had then become exposed to the anthrax by ingesting the aerosolized spores.

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis* bacteria. The 2009 New Hampshire incident represented the first gastrointestinal anthrax case recorded in the United States.

Between December 2009 and April 2010, 7 federal, 19 state, and 23 local agencies and organizations participated in the ensuing epidemiological investigation, prophylaxis activities, and remediation and recovery operations. New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS) personnel identified, contacted, and interviewed approximately 210 people who were at or near UNH UCM at the time of the anthrax release. This included 168 UCM visitors, 2 overnight guests, 4 workers, 28 volunteers, and 8 residents. Following this investigation, NHDHHS staff offered anthrax prophylaxis to 84 potentially exposed people. In addition, NHDHHS Division of Public Health Services, NH Department of Environmental Services, and NH National Guard 12th Civil Support Team personnel conducted environmental sampling at UNH UCM and at the patient's residence. Finally, these personnel tested approximately 30 drums to determine the possible source and level of anthrax contamination. Two drums and three UCM electrical outlets resulted contaminated and had to be disposed of.

The anthrax detected on the drums that participants played on December 4, 2009, was a naturally occurring strain that frequently appears in soil. Animals can ingest contaminated soil and pass the anthrax bacteria to people who handle their hides.

NHDHHS failed to notify local officials of potential threats and ongoing operations at the onset of emergency response operations. NHDHHS assumed command and control of the incident immediately after MGH medical personnel informed the department that an anthrax release had occurred in Durham. NHDHHS personnel briefed all appropriate local officials and emergency management and response personnel only 4 days after the beginning of the state-led operations. This lack of critical information during the initial days of the incident hindered the ability of Durham organizations to plan and conduct operations effectively. For example, soon after the incident, the Durham Fire Department had to establish response protocols for potential emergencies at UNH UCM without being fully aware of the health hazards associated with the anthrax release. Further, state personnel also delivered response equipment at UNH UCM without notifying local emergency responders. The after-action report states that, except in extreme circumstances, state emergency management should brief local officials prior to state and/or federal resources arriving in a community.

For additional information on informing local agencies and organizations, please also refer to the following *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lessons Learned:

- [Incident Management: Informing Elected Officials about Incidents](#)
- [Disaster and Emergency Declarations: Establishing Procedures for Informing Affected Localities](#)

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### CITATIONS

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Gastrointestinal Anthrax after an Animal-Hide Drumming Event - New Hampshire and Massachusetts, 2009." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Vol. 59, no. 28, 23 Jul 2010, pp. 872 – 877.

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