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LESSON LEARNED

Creating Makeshift Morgues in Hospitals During a Major Emergency

SUMMARY

In the event of a major medical emergency, hospital administrators should consider using remote, isolated, or unused spaces in their facilities as makeshift morgues. Temperatures in these rooms can be set very low and air conditioning systems fully engaged to facilitate the proper handling of the deceased. In addition, transportation and traffic plans to and from these areas would need to be revisited and redesigned to allow for easy transfer of the deceased.

DESCRIPTION

During the Top Officials 2 (TopOff 2) exercise in 2003, which featured a simulated biological weapon attack at three major Chicago locations, several hospital personnel noted that their on-site morgues were not large enough to handle substantial numbers of deceased, while others commented that they didn't have a plan to expand their mortuary facilities if needed. This problem was alleviated where, in one case, a hospital established a temporary morgue in its basement, isolating the room and setting the temperature to 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Emergency responders should also consider using large refrigerated trucks as temporary morgue facilities, as was the case during the 1995 Chicago heat crisis that killed more than 700 persons.

To counter the absence of definitive plans for the transport of the deceased to and from the provisional morgue, some personnel noted that they needed to revisit their procedures for transferring the deceased, or redesign their traffic plans to handle the surge of victims.

CITATION

Leslee Stein-Spencer. *TopOff 2: Lessons Learned*. 1 Jul 2003.

Leslee Stein-Spencer. *TopOff 2 Critique: Version 2*. 27 Jun 2003.

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