

Is an Exercise Coming to Your Facility?

By Josh Rowland, State Training Coordinator, NPHL

Recently, the NPHL had the opportunity to participate in a full scale terrorism exercise. The exercise, organized by the Wyoming 84th Civil Support Team (CST) and the Center for National Response based in West Virginia, took place in the Nebraska Panhandle and spanned many Nebraska counties and involved the State of Wyoming as well as the Nebraska 72nd CST. The primary focus of the exercise was to test communication and interagency cooperation among the many fire, police, hazmat entities within their city, county, and state organizations. The NPHL, along with the Wyoming Public Health Laboratory (WPHL) were invited to participate in order to make the medical/public health aspects of the exercise more realistic and to help create an exercise that involved clinical laboratories in the region.

Although the drill incorporated a variety biological, chemical, and radiologic elements, the NPHL, working in conjunction with the WPHL decided to only incorporate the biological and chemical portion into the laboratory portion of the exercise. Two of the larger clinical laboratories in the exercise region were included in the drill. Regional West Medical Center laboratory in Scottsbluff were presented with a chemical terrorism event scenario, while the Box Butte General Hospital laboratory was asked to address a biological event scenario. Both laboratories successfully responded to and addressed multiple challenges during their individual events. While the exercise only lasted a short time, the lessons learned by all, including the NPHL and WPHL have been invaluable.

As the public health laboratory (PHL) community continues to prepare for events such as those incorporated into this exercise, we are reminded that laboratory response may rely heavily on those clinical laboratories on the front line, especially early-on in the event. One of the primary goals of PHLs is to be sure that clinical laboratories are able to respond to such events. Exercises like the one in Panhandle are a great way to further prepare the laboratory community.

For more information about this exercise or if you are interested in conducting a laboratory exercise, please contact Josh Rowland at 402-559-6070.