
Section: 7.14 White Powder Response

Effective Date: 08/25/2008

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Approved by: Chief J. Ehret 08/25/2008

SCOPE

This guideline applies to all South Metro Fire Department personnel.

Background Information

Since 9/11, emergency responders have seen a series of anthrax scares caused by hoax letters and prank phone calls. There have been incidents where an inert powder was present and others where there was only a note or a phone call. The reaction to these events by first responders has resulted in wide-scale evacuation and decontamination. As a result of these scares, terrorists now know that the mere mention of the word "anthrax" will immediately cause such a disruption. The media's reporting of these events has dramatically impacted the level of response to similar incidents.

Anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*) was first prepared as a weapon in the United States in the 1950's and continued to be produced until the biological weapon program was terminated. Anthrax is easily grown and can be kept almost indefinitely in the spore (dormant) form under the proper conditions. Although the United States no longer cultivates anthrax as a weapon, it is suspected that many other countries have biological weapons using this agent. It is reasonable to expect that terrorist organizations are either developing a weapon of this type or already have one at their disposal. The likelihood that a biological toxin could be used on the American population is real, due to the ease of acquiring these substances. Anthrax, considered by many as the Saturday Night Special of terrorists, is extremely stable and easily acquired and cultivated.

Exposure and Transmission

Anthrax is not an immediate threat and must be inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin via an open wound to cause an infection. Anthrax is not contagious and only people in the immediate area of the exposure need to be evaluated for decontamination. Although no person to person transmission has ever been documented, as a precaution, the victim should be treated as a patient with severe pulmonary disease. It is recommended to practice body substance isolation, respiratory isolation along with adequate negative flow ventilation.

Since anthrax is a particulate, its common form is a powder or dust. It is very difficult to keep anthrax airborne due to its large particle size; therefore, airborne exposure is very unlikely unless the agent has been aerosolized. Anthrax can be delivered to a target as dust that can be inhaled. Furthermore, it can contaminate the environment and drinking water, causing disease days or weeks after it is disseminated.

Personal Protective Equipment

Responders can be protected from anthrax spores by using the personal protective equipment recommended for bloodborne and airborne pathogens. This equipment includes gloves, HEPA respirator (ideally full-face if available), splash protection and a gown or coveralls.

An alternative would be to wear an SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) in place of the HEPA mask.

Initial Response

Although none of the incidents to date have involved anthrax, all incidents should be treated as if the agent is present until the substance is identified through laboratory testing. The threatened use of weapons of mass destruction is a federal crime and should be reported to the FBI as soon as possible. These incidents are crime scenes, with the FBI being the lead federal agency.

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A Haz-Mat Team response is not generally needed. Chemical protective clothing is not required and only minor decontamination may be warranted.

The following should be considered:

- Approach the incident from the upwind side.
- Size-up the incident, look for the unusual and request assistance as needed.
 - Consider Haz-mat response, HealthEast, Law Enforcement
- Establish a command post and implement a "Unified Command".
- Notify the Minnesota Duty Officer at (651)649-5451 or 1-800-422-0798
 - They should notify:
 - National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802
 - Local office of the FBI
 - Minnesota Department of Health
 - They can also notify other resources:
 - Haz-mat teams
 - Bomb squad
 - Department of Public Safety
 - State of Minnesota Authorized Ordinance Disposal Teams
 - State Emergency Operating Center
 - Other State agencies as needed
- Use personal protective equipment as described earlier.
- Secure the scene, prevent entry into and exit out of the area until authorized. Limit the number of people who come in contact with the substance by immediately limiting access to the immediate area in which it is discovered.
- Ask involved people to minimize their contact with the substance and their surroundings because the area is now a crime scene
- Separate potentially exposed people from the non-exposed.
- Move all "uninvolved" people out of the immediate area to a holding area
- Shut off air handling systems (HVAC).
- Evaluate the potential of the incident. Estimate the possible area contaminated and the number of potentially exposed people.
- Contain agent if safely possible (sealed plastic bag).
- Local authorities are responsible for managing the scene, cooperating with the FBI.
- Coordinate the decontamination and tracking of exposed persons.
- Establish a public information officer. Remember this is a Unified Command.
- The state has initial laboratory analysis available through the Health Department in cooperation with the FBI. The state turn around time is about 6 hours from the time the sample gets to the lab.
- Federal laboratory analysis will take 36 to 48 hours.

If the material hasn't been weaponized or aerosolized, immediate isolation of the area and decontamination of any persons potentially contaminated is recommended.

The immediate hospitalization or treatment of exposed persons is not necessary

Communications Center

The communications center personnel should consider:

- Dispatch Police, Fire and HealthEast to the incident, being as discrete as possible. Consider using phones, cellular phones or MDT's before resorting to a typical call dispatch via radio.
- Instruct individual to place material in zip-lock plastic bag and then into another bag, if possible, without causing more contamination.
- Instruct individuals to wash hands if this can be accomplished in the immediate area.
- Instruct individuals not to disturb the scene. This is a federal crime scene.

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- Notify the Minnesota State Duty Officer at 651/649-5451 or 1/800/422-0798.
- Follow their department policies.

Police

Police officers should consider:

- Secure the scene.
- Prevent entrance by new people.
- Prevent people in the area from leaving until authorized.
- Wear protective gloves and HEPA mask (standard equipment used in protection for airborne and bloodborne pathogens) if entering a potentially contaminated area.
- Coordinate investigation and interviews with the FBI.
- Follow their department policies.

Media

When dealing with an anthrax incident, a low profile is preferable, try not to draw attention to the event. If necessary, a joint statement should be given, including the FBI/DEM/MDH/police/fire/other involved agencies. Statements should reassure that steps are being taken, individuals are being managed appropriately, no immediate danger to the public exists and give an estimated time until test results will be known

Decontamination

Persons who may be in the immediate area and are potentially contaminated should be washed with soap and water. Victims exposed to aerosolized, powdered, liquid or other contaminated material should remove clothing and decontaminate skin with a water flush (shower if possible). This should then be followed by a final rinse of a 0.5% bleach solution (1:10 dilution of 5.25% hypochlorite to water). Iodine is also effective when used at a disinfectant strength. Victims should dress using clean clothes. Contaminated clothing should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and held on site until laboratory results are known.

Building areas and equipment should be cleaned with a 5% bleach solution.

Reusable personal protective equipment can simply be decontaminated with soap and water unless there is direct contact with the agent (confirmed presence), then the diluted bleach solution should be used as necessary.

Follow Up

All involved parties should meet shortly after the event, when test results are known, to identify successes, problems and make modifications to the plan.

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PACKAGES**Confirmed suspicious package or flat mail with a release:**

We will work under a Unified command structure keeping in mind that both departments have specialized needs.

- The DCC should notify you by the alarm requesting the officer in charge call the communication center at 651.332.8657
- Respond routine unless it is deemed Code 3 is necessary
- Establish unified command and follow Anthrax & HazMat policies
- Establish & confirm the credible release of product
- Secure the area
- Locate a building representative, (prints, HVAC information)
- Don protective gear (tyvek, respiratory protection, gloves)
- It will be important to have decon for Firefighters set before entry.
- Assist to decon the victim, keeping in mind to minimize the hot zone (you may need to remove the victims shoes, wrap a sheet around the victim & escort to a janitor slop sink, shower or area that can be used to decon). Give the victim the decon bucket with solution). Bring a second sheet for the decontaminated victim, the decon bucket w/solution & barrier tape and baggies.
- Isolate the hot zone and you may need to isolate HVAC
- Collect a sample, double bag & deliver to PD in a third bag, we will want to make one entry
- Contact State Duty Officer for testing & notification of proper authorities, you may want to contact the 55th Civil Support Team separately for testing of the product.
- Decon entry team
- Assist PD with gathering of names
- Attempt to reassure the public & victims
- Terminate command, turn incident to PD

It will be important to minimize the impact to the remainder of the building. A strong defensive action should be taken to keep the hot zone as tight as possible. Should we respond to a public school, it will important to help minimize over reaction since the event currently is likely to be a hoax (although treat as a threat). Keep in mind that anthrax is typically not IDLH.

Sources

Suggested Response Activities Anthrax Incidents, State of Minnesota, 1999 – Minnesota State Fire Marshal's Office

Terrorism Handbook for Operational Responders - Bevelacqua/Stilp

Special Bulletin: Anthrax Advisory - National Domestic Preparedness Office

Anthrax scares ... - Fire Chief / February 1999