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76. THE NEW GLOBAL STANDARD: WMD COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

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In 1993 an explosion rocked the World Trade Center and for the first time the American public realized its perception that terrorism only happens "over there" might be outmoded. In the wake of this, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the nerve gas attack in the Tokyo subway system, the WMD Community Preparedness Program was born. SBCCOM, the center of the U.S. Department of Defense's chemical and biological expertise, developed a WMD Community Preparedness Program to improve the capability of the civilian sector to prepare for and respond to terrorist incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) weapons of mass destruction.

BACKGROUND

The WMD Community Preparedness Program is just one part of the overall Homeland Defense (HLD) Program, which melds past experience with future thrusts through technical expertise. The HLD program also includes the Domestic Preparedness Program, which SBCCOM has been conducting since 1997, and a newly created but similarly structured program for military installations and the surrounding civilian communities, both at home and abroad.

THE DOMESTIC PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

The Domestic Preparedness Program (DPP) objectives are: to provide enhanced support to improve the capabilities of state and local emergency response agencies to prevent and respond to terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction at both the national and local levels, and to enhance the capability of the federal government to prevent and respond to such incidents. The program consists of four main elements critical to effective preparation and response: training, exercises, response planning, and technical assistance. A series of training courses provides local emergency responders such as fire fighters, law enforcement personnel, emergency medical specialists, hospital providers, HAZMAT technicians, emergency operations center personnel, and senior elected officials with the knowledge about chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials necessary to effectively deal with terrorist incidents. Tabletop and functional exercises conducted in local venues with scenarios specific to those locations allow the response elements to practice what they've learned from the training courses, as well as to develop synergistic working relationships with personnel from other functional areas and with supporting organizations that provide local mutual aid. Full-scale annual Federal, State and local exercises conducted over the past four years served to exercise the full range of support which could be provided to a local community from State and Federal response organizations when requested by local officials. During the course of the DPP, from 1997-2000, SBCCOM trained and exercised over 28,500 individuals in 105 of the most populated cities in the US, and conducted 336 exercises and workshops in those localities. This training and exercise program is continuing this year under the auspices of the US Department of Justice.

IMPROVED RESPONSE PROCESS

During the course of the city training and exercise program, first responders surfaced

tough problems and issues related to chemical and biological agents which required development of detailed technical solutions which had to be validated before they could be put into practice by the responders. This was done via the Improved Response Process (IRP). Through a series of workshops, technical investigations and exercises, SBCCOM developed practical solutions to these tough problems, which responders could use with minimal change in their normal procedures and equipment. These solutions were then validated by functional exercises involving the actual responders such as SWAT teams or fire fighting companies. These solutions were then fed back into the city training program to ensure the most recent information on best practices was provided. Through this process, which is a systematic analysis of concepts, plans, procedures and equipment, our first responders are able to enhance their effectiveness when dealing with chemical and biological terrorist incidents.

The IRP was used to provide solutions related to personnel protective equipment and detection capabilities, mass casualty decontamination techniques, crime scene preservation, and responder asset management. In addition, the IRP team has expertise in developing and tailoring response templates, building protection and decontamination procedures, both for civilian communities and military installations.

WMD PREPAREDNESS PROCESS

The WMD Preparedness Process is depicted in Figure 1. After a program overview meeting, a series of modular exercises, training, and planning workshops are provided which all work in concert to establish a baseline of current preparedness via a tabletop exercise, deliver tailored training based upon the established baseline, and re-evaluate preparedness with tabletop and functional exercises. Technical assistance and response planning tie training and exercises into a single, comprehensive package providing “cradle to grave” service to those who need it most. This process can be applied to military installations as well as local communities, and has been tailored for specific application to the medical community, as shown in Figure 2.

SUMMARY

A full range of products and services is available from SBCCOM to enhance the capability of the international community to effectively respond to chemical or biological terrorism. Along with the training and exercise program discussed above, technical assistance offers building and fixed site protection and the evaluation of commercially available protection, detection, and decontamination equipment. Response planning assists planners and responders in establishing response roles, identifying limitations with current assistance requests, and developing a community CBRN Response Plan consistent with unique community procedures. The WMD Community Preparedness Program’s approach of providing “cradle to grave” services through a single, comprehensive program has resulted in a proven and effective method of improving preparedness and response capabilities nationwide, and in the international arena as well.

KEY WORDS

Terrorism, biological terrorism, biological agents, chemical terrorism, chemical agents, chemical warfare, CBRN, weapons of mass destruction, SBCCOM, community preparedness, homeland security, Homeland Defense, Domestic Preparedness Program, Improved Response Program, emergency management, emergency medical services, hazardous-materials, public health, medical response, medical surveillance, bioresponse template, personal protection, decontamination, medical treatment, training.

FIGURES

Figure 1. WMD Preparedness Process

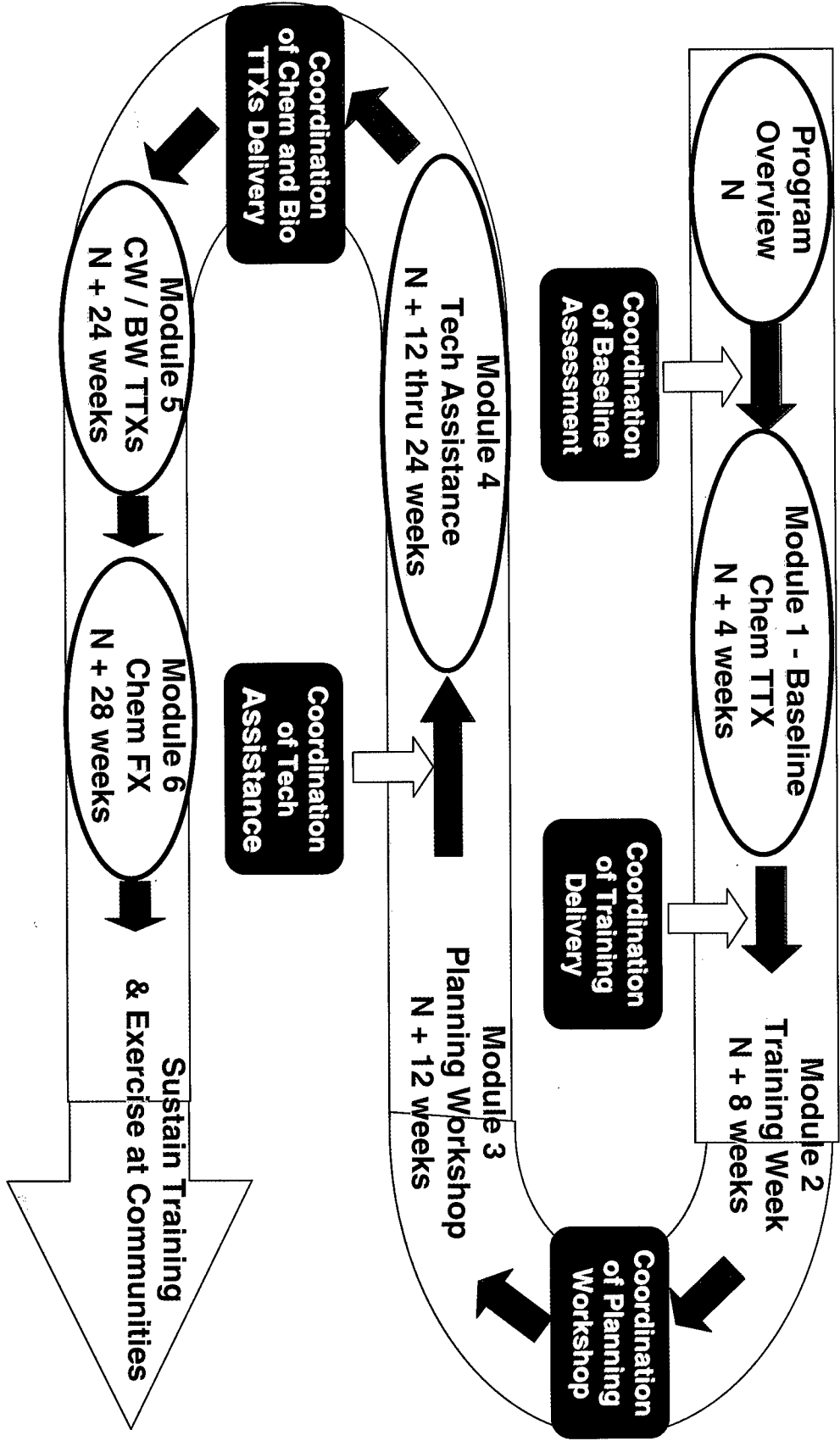


Figure 2. Medical Services Application

