

Empire '09 Dirty Bomb Exercise

June 2-June 4, 2009

Thank You from Vermont Health Commissioner Wendy Davis, MD

I just wanted to take a few minutes to let you all know how much I appreciate the work and professional dedication you ALL have put into this very important exercise.

I know “This is an exercise. This is NOT a real event.” I also know the key words that have been used to describe the scenario you have been exercising are “frightening” and “challenging” – I have used them myself when talking about our role here in Vermont during these past few days.

Even though, in the scenario, Vermont has had it far easier than New York, the exercise events have felt real, even watching from the sidelines. That’s a good thing. This kind of exercise gives clarity to our shared mission and gives us empathy with the needs of the people we serve.

By all accounts, this has been an EXCEPTIONAL exercise and, I know, a valuable learning opportunity for all of us to test together our plans, equipment, personnel, our messages, and our coordination.

I want to first thank our partner agency teams - all of you with EPA Region 1, with Connecticut’s mobile lab, and with the 15th Civil support Team. You have provided the expertise and resources that have made our response to New York’s dirty bomb scenario -- as Bill Irwin has said -- many times

more effective than we would be without your aid. We so very deeply appreciate your mobilizing to help in this worthy effort.

A great thanks also to all of you in our sister agencies in Vermont for your work on the radiological sampling teams and in the Health Operations Center. Thanks the Vermont HazMat team, the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, the Agency of Natural Resources, the Department of Labor, Vermont Homeland Security -- and to the Department of Public Safety in general and the Vermont Police Academy in particular for logistical and operational support.

I have to recognize too all the local people at the farms, the state parks, the fire departments and in the towns for all their help -- providing real eggs and real milk and real soil and vegetation samples for real testing, providing real logistical help ... with all the details that add up to make this a real exercise of our collective capabilities.

And, not least, I want to thank all of my staff from the Vermont Department of Health who worked so hard to plan and play out this exercise while dealing with our newest day to day realities -- I'm thinking especially about the new H1N1 flu.

A special thanks to all of you up at the Lab, our top-flight risk assessors, the Health Operations Center team, and all of you working out in the field.

Thank you HOC –

Razelle Hoffman-Contois

Brian Wemple
Rob Lunn
Liz Wirsing
Linda Boccuzzo
and the Communication Office team.

Thank you Lab –
George Mills
Cecylia Karch
Bob Drawbaugh
Stella Celotti

Thanks to all of you out in the field today –
Al Burns
Robert Bruce
Taylor Gillich (pronounced Gillick)
Chip Gosbee

and to Bill Irwin for your outstanding leadership and direction.

Thanks to all of you -- Bill has told me that your professionalism and expert capabilities have merged nearly seamlessly to form a force capable of sustained and productive response.

I know we'll learn a lot from the past few days ... and we can take great heart in what we are able to accomplish working together.