Terrorism or All-Hazards? Broadening Homeland Security

By Anita Dance, Research Director, National Priorities Project

In response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the federal government underwent the largest reorganization since World War II. The executive branch defined a new mission area of "homeland security" and Congress created a new agency, the Department of Homeland Security. Since that time, the federal government alone has spent more than $200 billion on securing the homeland.

Elected officials, the media, security experts and others have raised issues about the implementation of homeland security to date: Much has been made about small towns (or less populated states) receiving levels of federal funding out or proportion with their level of risk. It also seems as if the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is following in the footsteps of the Department of Defense (DOD) in terms of procurement contracts with "significant over-charges, wasteful spending or missmanagement." Yet, others have pointed to vulnerabilities that remain under-funded such as port security.

Hurricane Katrina and the possibility of a bird flu pandemic raise other questions about the nation's level of preparedness in the event of a catastrophe regardless of cause. There are many interpretations of what went wrong with the response to Hurricane Katrina from local and state incompetence to federal indifference. This brief takes the view that federal government should adopt an all-hazards approach to homeland security. The administration and Congress acknowledged the importance of all-hazards preparedness, yet the mission area of homeland security remains focused—too focused—on terrorism. While the National Response Plan (NRP) is intended to be "a single, comprehensive approach to domestic incident management," the actual implementation of the homeland security mission is by definition concerned only with terrorist incidents. Federal support for first responder equipment and training has followed the emphasis on terrorism over all-hazards. Yet, an all-hazards approach will better prepare first responders and state and local officials for any incident, whether terrorist attack or natural disaster.

WHAT IS HOMELAND SECURITY?

The executive branch defines homeland security as a mission area that "is a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur." The mission area of homeland security is not coterminous with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), though the agency's mission is similar in definition "[t]o lead the unified national effort to secure America...prevent and deter terrorist attacks and protect against and respond to threats and hazards to the nation...ensure safe and secure borders, welcome lawful immigrants and visitors, and promote the free-flow of commerce."


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The mission area of homeland security includes activities outside of the agency, but also, some of the agency's activities are not considered part of the mission area. Out of the $58 billion in proposed budget authority for homeland security mission area in fiscal year 2007, around $31 billion would be directed to agencies outside of DHS. Most of the major federal agencies carry out some form of homeland security activity, but the largest share of the non-DHS money—56% under the proposed budget—goes to the Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD uses most of its homeland security money for protecting military facilities. The other major non-DHS agencies include the Department of Health and Human Services for disease and vaccine research, the Department of Justice for the FBI and other law enforcement activities, and the Department of Energy for protection of nuclear weapons and related activities. DHS activities that are not considered homeland security activities include disaster relief, Coast Guard activities, and immigration services. The majority of DHS budget, $28 billion out of $43 billion proposed in 2007, is devoted to the homeland security mission area. (See box below)

Response to natural disasters, including catastrophic natural events such as Hurricane Katrina, does not fall within the definition of a homeland security activity. However, in preparing for terrorism-related threats, many of the activities within this mission area also support preparedness for catastrophic natural disasters.

Legislation, presidential directives, and appropriations related to homeland security have placed a special emphasis on preparedness for terrorism. For example, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 indicated an all-hazards approach to national preparedness, but with a special emphasis on terrorism. It specifically stated that funding to local governments for first responders should emphasize terrorism.

Department of Homeland Security funding to state and local government has followed the course. Of the first responder grants and assistance, the only two all-hazards programs, the Assistance to Firefighters Program and the Emergency Management Performance Grants, make up less than one-fourth of funding. The remainder of funding is directed toward terrorism preparedness. Even after the consequences of Hurricane Katrina, the trend continues. Under the administration's proposal for fiscal year 2007, the total federal assistance to state and local government for homeland security would be cut by 17% in nominal terms. Both of the all-hazard programs would be cut, with the Assistance to Firefighters Program cut by more than half.

Yet, state and local government need a different emphasis. Interviewed for a Government Accountability Office report, first responders commented on federal support. Firstly, they did not believe that the DHS training programs, exercise activities, and grant funds which claimed to be all-hazards were actually all-hazards. They found that all-hazards training overemphasized terrorism preparedness to the detriment of the training. Secondly, they disagreed with the overall emphasis on terrorism. Natural and accidental disasters were much more likely to happen in their jurisdictions and training that supported dealing with non-terrorist disasters was potentially more beneficial, more practical. State officials and first responders interviewed also stated a need for more dual use equipment for several reasons: to prevent the equipment from just rotting away on the shelf, maintain proficiency in its use by actually using it for everyday responses, and to build stronger all-hazards capabilities.

There seems little justification for federal support to emphasize terrorism preparedness at the expense of more comprehensive all-hazards preparedness. The DHS has identified 36 first responder capabilities specific to terrorism. Of the 36, a full 30 are all-hazards. While intelligence and law enforcement may prevent a terrorist attack, and infrastructure, environmental planning and weather systems may mitigate the impact of natural and accidental disasters, the human and financial costs of the latter can be just as devastating as the former. Moreover, natural disasters like terrorist attacks do not confine their impact to one town, county or state. In many cases, they can be a national event even if the more serious impact is local.

National Planning Scenarios, which are "all-hazards planning scenarios for use in national, federal, state and local homeland security preparedness exercises" created by the DHS, overwhelmingly focus on terrorism. Of the 15 national planning scenarios, 12 of them are terrorist attacks and only 3 are natural disasters:

NEGLECTING MORE COMMON DISASTERS AND INCIDENTS

Neither the mission statements of homeland security or of DHS mention natural or accidental disasters. The administration made the exclusion clear in the most recent budget proposal (for fiscal year 2007):
1. Nuclear Detonation - 10-Kiloto
   Improvised Nuclear Device
2. Biological Attack—Aerosol Anthrax
3. Biological Disease Outbreak—
   Pandemic Influenza
4. Biological Attack—Plague
5. Chemical Attack—Blister Agent
6. Chemical Attack—Toxic Industrial Chemicals
7. Chemical Attack—Nerve Agent
8. Chemical Attack—Chlorine Tank Explosion
9. Natural Disaster—Major Earthquake
10. Natural Disaster—Major Hurricane
11. Radiological Attack—Radiological Dispersal Device
13. Biological Attack—Food Contamination
14. Biological Attack—Foreign Animal Disease (Foot and Mouth diseases)
15. Cyber Attack

Some state and local officials as well as experts in emergency preparedness felt that these scenarios did not adequately reflect an assessment of risk and questioned whether these were appropriate planning scenarios in terms of plausibility and number of scenarios that are based on terrorist attacks.

The major exercise for disaster training, referred to as “TOPOFF” for Top Officials Exercise, only involves terrorist-related incidents. TOPOFF is a congressionally mandated biennial cycle of seminars, exercises, and planning events to prepare for and respond to a terrorist incident. The most recent TOPOFF exercise employed scenarios 4, 5, and 12, involving a biological attack of the pneumonic plague in New Jersey, and mustard gas and a high-level explosive device in Connecticut.

The resources are much more limited for exercises concerning natural disasters. For example, in 2004, the Federal Emergency Management Agency conducted a 5-day, tabletop exercise where a major hurricane hit Louisiana, “Hurricane Pam.” A second Hurricane Pam was planned for summer of 2005 (that would have hopefully achieved better results than the first exercise), but did not take place due to a lack of funding. After the devastating consequences of Hurricane Katrina, the House of Representatives acknowledged the importance of all-hazard preparedness in its appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security:

The Committee believes that the Office of the Under Secretary for Preparedness must continue to encourage an all-hazards approach to preparedness in grants, assistance, and funding requests and allocations. The House Bipartisan Committee on Hurricane Katrina concluded that, while a majority of State and local preparedness grants are required to have a terrorism purpose, this does not preclude a dual-use application. The Committee expects that the fiscal year 2007 grant guidance will further support all-hazards activities. The Committee encourages the Under Secretary for Preparedness to give natural disasters appropriate weight in its risk-based funding methodology.

In the appropriations bill for homeland security, the House did not adopt the cuts to all-hazards programs proposed by the administration. Yet, these two programs would constitute only 22% of federal funding to state and local governments for first responder and related money. It is not enough for Congress to say that the Preparedness Directorate should “continue to encourage” all hazards. Natural and accidental disasters must be recognized for what they are: all too common costly events that negatively impact our country and its economy. The nation will be more secure and mitigate the costs of disaster if more than rhetoric is applied to the all-hazards approach to preparedness.

MOVING FORWARD FOR BETTER SECURITY

Adopting an all-hazards approach involves redefining the mission of homeland security to include the preparation for and response to not only terrorist attacks, but also natural and accidental disasters. By better integrating all-hazards planning and ensuring comprehensive state and local planning, the federal government will be in a much better position to co-operate or co-ordinate any type of response. First responders will be better trained and equipped to deal with emergencies. The financial and human costs of natural and accidental disasters will be mitigated.

Possible steps include:
- Redefine the mission of homeland security to explicitly include the preparation for, mitigation of, and recovery from natural and accidental disasters;
- Broaden all first responders programs to explicitly allow funding for all-hazards preparation without a necessary terrorism focus;
- Include in the mission of the Preparedness Directorate preparation for natural and accidental disasters, and base risk assessments that guide funding decisions on all types of disasters.
- Conduct more planning exercises for natural and accidental disasters so that expenditures for natural and accidental disasters is closer to the resources spent on the TOPOFF exercise, and impose greater accountability for implementing the lessons learned from the exercises.
- More specifically integrate the timing and role of proactive federal support during an emergency in the National Response Plan.

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Anita Dancs is Research Director for the National Priorities Project. She researches and writes on the impact of federal policies, and is the primary author of NPP publications. Anita has a PhD in economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and spent years teaching and researching at universities in Hungary, the UK and the US. She also has over 10 years experience teaching popular economics to activists as a staff economist with the Center for Popular Economics, and is a member of the Security Policy Working Group.

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News from the COSH’s

RI COSH
Rhode Island Chemical Safe Schools Project

This is a story about a unique chemical safety project involving schools in Rhode Island.

The stimulus for the project came about as a result of RI Departments of Labor and Environmental Management compliance inspections regarding chemical safety in school labs. The findings from inspections include:

- Dangerous chemicals stored in leaking, rusted or inappropriate containers (food jars, film canisters)
- Misidentified and mislabeled chemicals
- Explosives such as ammonium, nitrate, ether, and picric acid
- Toxic heavy metals (cadmium, chromium, lead and mercury)
- Sodium, lithium, and potassium metal (extremely reactive can explode on contact with water)
- Toxic solvents such as benzene, toluene, and xylene

As a result two important events took place. One, a chemical safety regulation for school labs was adopted; and the other, the RI Chemical Safe School Committee (RICSSC) was formed.

The Regulation

Under Rhode Island Department of Education/Department of Health (RIDE/RIDOH) regulation (Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs, Section 39.0-Laboratories, Shops and Other Special Purpose Areas) many hazardous chemicals have to be removed from schools and can no longer be purchased. (Career and technical vocational programs have exemptions.)

Examples of banned chemicals (800 or more) that have been found improperly stored and incorrectly identified in schools include:

- Alkaline metals (can explode in contact with water)
- Lead compounds
- Picric Acid (can explode by moving the container)

A chemical mishap could be disastrous for students and staff. To prevent such an occurrence it was thought best to prohibit many highly hazardous chemicals outright.

Another key part of the RIDE/RIDOH regulation is that all districts/Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must establish a chemical hygiene plan (CHP) and appoint a chemical hygiene officer. (There is a special OSHA rule on labs called the Lab Safety Standard which is the fountainhead of this requirement.)

Key Elements of a Chemical Hygiene Plan:

- Implement appropriate safety and health operating procedures involving the use of hazardous chemical. e.g. proper marking and labels, use appropriate containers, proper storage, and proper disposal.
- Employ control measures to reduce exposure to hazardous materials: (i.e. fume hoods, glove boxes, and other direct exhaust systems, goggles, gloves, no food or beverages.)
- Provide training for anyone (staff and students) working with hazardous substances on the physical and health hazards of the chemicals used, the measures adopted to protect against these hazards (personal protective equipment, appropriate work practices, emergency response actions), and applicable details of the CHP.

The Committee

The Rhode Island Chemical Safe Schools Committee is a collaborative effort of state agencies, chemists, educators and health advocates to help eliminate or minimize risks associated with hazardous chemicals in schools, and to provide resources and assistance to schools. RICSSC participants include:

- RI Department of Environmental Management (RDEM)
- RI Department of Education (RIDE)
- RIDE Department of Health (RIDOH)
- RIDOH Department of Labor and Training (RIDLCT)
- Brown University, Office of Environmental Health and Safety
- Community College RI

- RI Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (RICOSH)
- Miriam Hospital, Safety management

There are several noteworthy measures the committee has undertaken. The Department of Environmental Management, staff visited schools to help remove chemicals. The Department of Health managed to leverage small grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Environmental Protection Agency to fund removal of prohibited chemicals from schools. In addition, the RICSSC has conducted workshops to assist teachers, administrators and staff on:

- Lab Safety and Hazardous Waste
- Developing a Chemical Hygiene Plan
- Hazardous Waste Management

The committee has developed a Lab Safety Workbook and CD and started a RI Chemical Hygiene Officer website: http://www.health.ri.gov/environment/risk/chemicalhygiene/index.php

Chemical safety is a key concern for teachers’ unions. If you have any questions or wish to explore the issue in more detail, please contact RICOSH at 401.761.3015 or via email at job-health@uoro.com

NH COSH

NH COSH announces its new website at www.nhcosh.org.

NH COSH, TNEC, and the NH Health Officer Liaison will present their annual All Hazards Emergency Response Training for municipal health officers on July 12 in Concord, NH.

Several hundred immigrant workers have been trained this year by NH COSH on workplace safety and health issues, including hazardous materials awareness, safety equipment, OSHA rights, and workers’ compensation. NH COSH is researching how to help low-income and immigrant workers get the workers’ compensation medical and disability pay they are entitled to when injured at work. NH COSH continues to participate in the states’ Asthma Healthy Schools Team.
Coming Soon.....

Labor-Environmental Coalitions: Lessons from a Louisiana Petrochemical Region
by Thomas Estabrook

Work, Health and Environment Series, Charles Levenstein and John Wooding, Series Editors

About the Book

In 1984, the oil, chemical and atomic workers began a 5 year campaign to win back the jobs of its members locked out by the BASP Corp. in Geismar, Louisiana. The multiscale campaign involved coalitions with local environmentalists as well as international solidarity from environmental and religious organizations. The local coalition which helped break the lockout was maintained and expanded in the 1990s. This alliance is one of numerous labor-community coalitions to emerge increasingly over the past 20 years. Labor-Environmental Coalitions: Lessons from a Louisiana Petrochemical Region traces the development of the Louisiana Labor-Neighbor Project from 1985 to the present, within the context of a long history of divisions between labor and community in the U.S. The Project continued after the lockout, thriving during 1990s, expanded from one community to four counties to include 20 local member organizations, and broadening its agenda from the original jobs crisis and pollution problems to address a wide range of worker, environmental health, and economic justice issues.

Labor-Environmental Coalitions explores the dynamics of the Louisiana coalition to offer lessons for other coalition efforts. The book seeks to understand coalitions as a necessary strategy to counteract the dominant forces of capitalist development. The author contends that the Labor-Neighbor Project, like labor-community coalitions generally, created a unique blend of politics shaped by the geographic nature of the industry's politics; by the relative openness of government; and by the class experience of labor and community members. The Louisiana Project demonstrates that for labor-community coalitions to thrive they must broaden their agenda, strengthen their leadership and coalition-building skills, and develop access to multiscale resources. The author argues that for labor-community coalitions to have longer term political impact, they should adopt an explicitly progressive approach by building a broader class and cultural leadership, and by demanding state and corporate accountability on economic, public health, and environmental justice issues.

About the Author:

Thomas Estabrook is a worker health educator with The New England Consortium and he also does clean production policy research. He received his Ph.D. in geography from Clark University in 1995 and currently is also adjunct professor of geography at Framingham State College and UMass Lowell. He has been active in labor-community coalitions since working as an organizer for the Louisiana Labor-Neighbor Project in the early 1990s. He is a member of the advisory board of the Alliance for a Health Tomorrow, in Massachusetts, a broad coalition of environmental, public health, and labor groups promoting precautionary strategies. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts with his wife and two sons.
Wampanoag Training

The New England Consortium (TNEC) in October of 2006 presented to the tribal members of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and the local police a 24-hour Emergency Responder Refresher training. TNEC’s 3-day program combines interactive classroom activities, dress out and a live emergency simulation to prepare for proper response.

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and the Town of Gay Head entered into agreement in June of 1995 to jointly provide for the health, safety and welfare of persons on Tribal Lands by providing for the use of police, fire and medical personnel and resources in the event of disaster, disorder, fire or other emergencies arising on Tribal Lands.

Farewell to a Good Friend

A few days before the holidays in December of 2006, the staff and members of The New England Consortium (TNEC) received heartbreaking news. Aaron D. Wilson, 35, of South Hadley, MA and the Executive Director of Western Mass COSH, a TNEC project partner, died unexpectedly of heart failure in his sleep on December 21, 2006. Aaron was a tireless organizer, writer, leader and activist for civil rights and social justice, who devoted his regrettable short life to improving the world.

After graduating from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a major in History and a minor in African American Studies, Aaron continued his education at Columbia University, earning two Master’s degrees, one in Social Studies from Teacher’s College and one with honors in Organizational Management.

Aaron was active in politics both locally in Amherst, including as a member of the Amherst Town meeting, and at the Statehouse. Aaron served as the Executive Director for the Western Mass COSH in Springfield, where he trained union members in improving health and safety conditions; this included helping families of deceased Chapman Valve, Inc. employees get compensation for uranium ore exposure. He helped broker the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a joint effort of labor and environmental groups promoting safer alternatives to toxic chemical use. Aaron also served as a delegate for Governor Deval Patrick. For his service to the community, Aaron received the Micah Award for Springfield Community Activist of the Year and Unsung Hero Award, among many others. Aaron loved science fiction and history, excelled at stretching a budget, and he appreciated all of life’s pleasures, especially music.

Aaron is survived by his beloved mother, Maryann Wilson of Bennington, VT; his father, David Harper; his uncle and friend, Eric C. Wilson of Hudson, MA; his perennial sweetheart, Diana Dilmore of Amherst, MA; many other devoted friends and associates, especially all of us at TNEC and our COSH project partners, and two mischievous cats, Neko and Niko.

A memorial service was held at the UMass Amherst Campus Center Auditorium in January, 2007. The family requests that in the memory of Aaron, donations be made in his name to a scholarship via this website http://RememberingAaron.org.