



EPAD IN ACTION BIOTERRORISM

“The first responders to such incidents will always be local firefighters, police and health departments—not the army, navy, air force or marines. We need the federal government to cooperate, share information and collaborate with the governments of the 19 jurisdictions of metropolitan Washington.”

Gerald E. Connolly
Fairfax Board of Supervisors
Chairman
Fairfax County, Virginia

COMCARE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE ALLIANCE

1701 K STREET NW
FOURTH FLOOR
WASHINGTON DC 20006
202.429.0574
WWW.COMCARE.ORG

Emergency Response **Problem:**

On Thursday, March 10, 2005, routine swabs taken from mail screening equipment at the Pentagon's Remote Delivery Facility showed potential anthrax contamination. On Monday, March 12, 2005 after receiving a positive test result, the Arlington County Fire Department and hazmat units respond to the Pentagon's alert. On the same day at 2:30 PM, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue respond to the Department of Defense Skyline facility after a mail sensor detects a suspicious biological substance. Personnel are decontaminated and about 800 workers in the building are locked down while tests are completed. On Tuesday, March 13, 2005, the US Postal Service facility in the District of Columbia is closed and workers receive a three-day regimen of antibiotics.

Unfortunately, the Fairfax County emergency management coordinator learned about the Pentagon incident hours later from his counterpart in Arlington, after it had already responded to a similar call. Pentagon officials called the Arlington Fire department because they reside in that county. However, no other departments in the region received notification. Regional officials believe that reliance on detection and response systems that are isolated from those of other agencies delayed Virginia health officials, the US Postal Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from moving to protect the public from a possible biohazard in the mail. Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.) called for a regional response summit. According to the deputy staff director for Davis, a lot of time and money has been spent to improve regional coordination and preparedness but these events suggest that much more needs to be done.¹

¹ “Anthrax Scare: Information Flow”, March 16, 2005, “Anthrax Alarm Uncovers Response Flaws”, March 17, 2005, Page A01, “Anthrax Response Brings Calls for Summit”, March 17, 2005, Page B01, Washington Post.

E-Safety and EPAD **Solution:**

An E-Safety Network would have solved many of the communications problems experienced during these anthrax incidents. As a data-sharing framework, it embraces the use of national data standards and encourages information exchange across jurisdictions and disciplines. By using the Emergency Provider Access Directory (EPAD), Pentagon officials could have easily routed messages to all appropriate regional agencies, without needing to know their electronic addresses or contact information. Regional agencies would have had the information they needed to be proactive protecting other similar facilities as well as the public.

Registration in EPAD is an important first step for achieving efficient information exchange. Emergency agencies and authorized private entities register how and where they want data sent to them. They indicate their incident information preferences with corresponding geographic areas. This simple act of EPAD registration enables the geographic targeting and cooperative exchange of vital information about a mass emergency or a single event to all appropriate authorities quickly and securely.

COMCARE is a national non-profit alliance dedicated to **advancing emergency response**. We promote the adoption of modern, interoperable emergency systems and the development of new procedures, training, and tools to maximize their value for emergency responders. We encourage cooperation across professional, jurisdictional and geographic lines, seeking to improve effectiveness through solutions that integrate emergency response professions, government, the public and private industry. COMCARE's 100+ organizational members represent the wide diversity of the emergency response community.