



National Association of State EMS Directors
National Association of EMS Physicians
American Public Health Association

Health Groups Call for Protection for Front Line Emergency Medical Providers

Washington, DC (October 30, 2001) - A joint statement issued today by leaders of three national health organizations calls for government action to protect emergency medical personnel during biological or chemical disasters.

The statement issued by the American Public Health Association (APHA), the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP), and the National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD) points out that during a crisis, communities rely on local emergency providers to organize and deliver care to the ill or injured, and prevent further spread of the chemical or biological agent. Therefore it is essential that protection of these personnel be given top priority and facilitated through predetermined protocols.

“If we are to effectively defend our communities from mass casualty incidents such as chemical or biologic attacks, our first concern must be to ensure that our front line health care, public health, and emergency medical personnel do not fall as casualties and leave the community defenseless.” explained Dr. Mohammad Akhter, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association.

“It is imperative that our emergency health care infrastructure be preserved during a crisis. These disasters can stress our health care resources to the limit. We cannot afford to have the system compromised through loss of personnel or to allow our emergency workers to become infected and transmit the harmful agents further into the community.” explained Dr. Richard Hunt, President of the National Association of EMS Physicians.

Dia Gainor, President of the NASEMSD and EMS Bureau Chief for the State of Idaho emphasized, “ In addition to immediate immunization or drug prophylaxis, resources are needed to ensure that emergency personnel have the proper protective equipment such as hazardous materials suits and breathing apparatus.”

This joint statement is the first action to take place under a new Memorandum of Understanding recently signed by the leaders of the APHA, NAEMSP, and the

NASEMSD. The MOU, established on October 22 at the APHA annual conference, recognizes the need for collaboration among public health and emergency medical personnel on issues involving the protection of communities from mass casualties such as acts of terrorism. With the MOU, these groups pledge to join forces to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated community response to threats.

For further information, contact the National Association of State EMS Directors (703) 538-1799, the National Association of EMS Physicians (913) 492-5858, and the American Public Health Association (202) 777-2435.

The APHA, NASEMSD, and the APHA jointly state:

It is imperative that the emergency health care infrastructure continue to serve the public and not transmit agents of infection during the war against terrorism. Emergency medical technicians, paramedics, public health providers, emergency nurses, primary care physicians, EMS physicians, and emergency physicians should receive safe and effective immunizations and/or drug prophylaxis against biological weapons when recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as soon as supplies are available.

In addition, front line emergency medical and public health personnel should be supplied with appropriate protective equipment, such as breathing apparatus and hazardous materials suits, to minimize their exposure to harmful agents during the course of their emergency duties.

The APHA, NAEMSP, and NASEMSD stress the criticality of these measures to the safety and health of our communities. Attention and support to the protection of front line medical providers should be given high priority in government efforts to enhance community defense against threats of terrorism.