

Forensic Epidemiology Course Overview

Background

The events of fall 2001, including the anthrax attacks and the thousands of biologic threats and hoaxes, required law enforcement, other public safety organizations, and public health agencies to work together in ways without precedent. The concurrent responses to such threats affirmed the many similarities in the goals and investigative methods used by both law enforcement and public health officials but also highlighted salient differences in the different disciplines' approaches. To foster improved understanding of the investigative goals and methods specific to each discipline and to strengthen interdisciplinary collaborative effectiveness in response to future attacks involving biological agents, in the spring of 2002 the Public Health Law Program of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in partnership with other agencies and organizations undertook the development of a module for the joint training of law enforcement and public health officials, this module has been termed "forensic epidemiology".

Goal

To enhance the joint effectiveness of law enforcement and public health when both disciplines conduct related investigations in response to a threat or attack involving possible biological weapons. The course addresses this goal by bringing law enforcement and public health officials together while working through fact-based case scenarios involving biological weapons attacks or threats.

Course Design

- 1 ½ days

- Employs a "Train-the-Trainers" strategy to emphasize peer teaching and to increase the capacity for sustainable, additional training within the state

- Didactic lectures (plenary):
 - Public Health Epidemiology for Law Enforcement
 - Criminal Investigation for Public Health Professionals
 - The Role of the Laboratory—Public Health and Forensic

- Case studies (Break-out groups):
 - Suspicious Letter in DeKalb County
 - Anthrax in Florida
 - Salmonellosis in Oregon

- Wrap-up (plenary):
 - Important information discussed during the case studies is summarized and possible after-action plans are discussed

Course Attendees

Participants

The course is designed for mixed groups of law enforcement, public health, and affiliated professionals (e.g., fire, HAZMAT, legal, public communication). In most courses the recommended mix is 40 percent public health, 40 percent law enforcement and 20 percent other professional groups.

Facilitators

The role of the facilitators is to draw out the expertise of the small group members and to fill in answers to the case study questions if no one else in the group can do so. Facilitators attend a half-day facilitator training activity before the first day of the course. Part of their role is to assure that key points are made during the break-out groups.

**Forensic Epidemiology
Implementation Plan for Iowa**

Activity	Date
Formation of Forensic Epidemiology Planning Committee	May 2003
Pre-Training for Forensic Epidemiology Planning Committee	July/August 2003
Forensic Epidemiology Training for Regional Facilitators (60 – 100 participants; planning committee members to serve as facilitators for break-out groups)	September 2003
Regional Forensic Epidemiology trainings	Beginning October/November 2003