

Terrorism Through the Mail: Protecting the Postal Workers and the Public

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and other distinguished members of this committee and subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. My name is Major General John S. Parker and I represent the outstanding scientists and professionals of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command and my biocontainment laboratory, the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, also known as USAMRIID. USAMRIID's mission is to develop the medical products, strategies, procedures, information, and training for medical defense of our service members against biological warfare and endemic infectious diseases that require biocontainment. In recent years this mission has expanded to include helping defend our nation against biological terrorism.

Since September 11th, USAMRIID has been fully engaged in supporting DOD, FBI, HHS, Congress, and the interagency community with round-the-clock, cutting-edge reference diagnostic capabilities. A large number of samples have been processed requiring over 31,750 laboratory assays. The results of these tests are reported to our customers upon full confirmation of the laboratory findings.

I am here today to discuss USAMRIID's support to the FBI in analyzing the powdery material contained in the letter sent to Senator Daschle. I present the following timeline to document the chronology of our response.

On the afternoon of 15 October, USAMRIID received samples from the FBI and the Capitol Police, which included letters addressed to Senator Daschle. The initial observation of the material in one of the letters, performed under biosafety level 3 containment conditions, revealed a fine, light tan powder that was easily dispersed

into the air. Preliminary laboratory results including polymerase chain reaction and fluorescent antibody stain indicated *Bacillus anthracis* spores. USAMRIID reported to the FBI on the afternoon of the 15th the preliminary results indicating that the material was anthrax spores. Further, one of our technicians/scientists made a statement that this material grossly had some attributes consistent with “weaponized” anthrax. On the evening of 15 October, USAMRIID completed the initial battery of confirmatory tests verifying positive results for anthrax. This additional information was relayed to the FBI that evening and was subsequently reiterated to the FBI and others in an interagency conference call the morning of 16 October. At that time, USAMRIID revisited the term “weaponized” and decided the terms “professionally done” and “energetic” as more appropriate descriptions in lieu of any real familiarity with weaponized materials.

On 16 October, USAMRIID began to examine the samples further via transmission electron microscopy (TEM). Initial TEM analysis was performed on hydrated powder. This study revealed that the material was comprised solely of a high concentration of spores without debris or vegetative forms, suggesting this material was refined or processed.

USAMRIID participated in an interagency conference call on the morning of 17 October, updating participants on the results of the antibiotic susceptibility profile. Statistical analyses for the spore dimensions from the TEM micrographs were begun on the 17th. On the same day, USAMRIID provided the FBI samples of the powder from the Daschle letter to send to another laboratory for analysis of the material. The results from TEM of the hydrated powder were reported to the interagency phone conference by the 18th.

On 17 October, I briefed the full Senate Caucus, Senator Daschle’s staff and the assembled Senate staff, in addition to participating in a news conference with Senators Daschle and Lott, on preliminary characterization of the sample.

USAMRIID next began investigating the dry powder on 18 October by scanning electron microscopy (SEM). This method revealed particle aggregates of varying sizes comprised solely of spores without a visible binding matrix. The material seen under SEM ranged in size from single spores to aggregates of spores up to 100 microns or more. The spores within the aggregate were uniform in appearance. The aggregates had a propensity to pulverize. We first relayed these observations to our customer, the FBI, on the evening of 19 October. A written progress report was hand-carried to the FBI on 22 October for a discussion of USAMRIID data in comparison with that of other laboratories contributing to the ongoing analysis and

investigation. USAMRIID's data were briefed to the Secretary, HHS, on 23 October, at his request.

USAMRIID continues to support the FBI in the ongoing investigation and any related analysis we can perform with our biocontainment capability and scientific expertise. We are proud to be an integral component in our Nation's defense and response to this tragic situation and I am especially grateful for the opportunity to address this august body today. I will now entertain your questions.