

**Testimony for “The Local Role in Homeland Security” before the Committee on  
Governmental Affairs**

**by**

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Good morning, Chairman Lieberman and members of the Committee on Governmental Affairs. I am Richard Sheirer, the Director of New York City’s Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM). I have spent over 34 years working in the field of public safety, 28 years with the New York City Fire Department, 4 years with the New York City Police Department and since February 2000 as the Director of OEM. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about New York City’s response to the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and to the subsequent anthrax bio-terrorist attack (incident). In 1996, Recognizing the need to enhance inter- agency and inter-governmental coordination when planning and preparing for and during emergency situations, Mayor Giuliani created the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management by Executive Order. OEM is a multi-jurisdictional agency comprised of personnel drawn from various City agencies, including the Police, Fire, and Health Departments, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Emergency Medical Services and other agencies. OEM has been described by the Mayor as New York City’s Office of Homeland Security. OEM was crucial in managing and coordinating the City’s response to the World Trade Center attack and the anthrax attacks and the on-going recovery efforts at the WTC site.

OEM has been tasked with the responsibilities of : Monitoring and responding to all potential emergency conditions and potential incidents that might require a multi-agency response;

Operating an emergency operations center (EOC) to enable the City to manage emergency conditions and potential incidents;

Researching, compiling, evaluating, and  
implementing citywide Contingency Plans  
ranging from bioterrorism planning to  
public information and media outreach

programs to provide the public with information and advice before an emergency strikes;

to the City’s All Hazards mitigation plan which provides the framework for agencies to respond to a large number of different types of emergency;

Prepare, organize, and implement drills and exercises; and

Coordinate special interagency and

Intergovernmental responses.

**EOC OPERATIONS** OEM activates the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in times of or in anticipation of multi- agency emergencies or events affecting the health and

safety of people who live, work or visit the City. During and after the World Trade Center attack, the EOC operated on a 24 hour, 7 day week basis with representatives of 110 local, state, and federal agencies, voluntary organizations such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army; and public utility companies which provided gas, electric, steam and telephone communications. These 110 agencies were represented by anywhere from 300 to 1000 people in the EOC at any given time. On September 11, 2001, after the first airplane flew into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, OEM immediately activated its emergency operations center and coordinated emergency operations in conjunction with the Fire Department, the Police Department, the Port Authority Police, and numerous other agencies and organizations. Despite the loss of OEM's EOC in 7 World Trade Center, at the moment when it was needed most, OEM (within 72 hours) quickly reestablished an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and continued to coordinate the City's emergency response to the World Trade Center attack. The importance of a fully equipped, technologically advanced Emergency Operations Center to coordinate federal, state, and local responses to the September 11, 2001 attack was immeasurable. It was possible to immediately share and gather information among the various federal, state, and local agencies to address issues as they arose. It also made it possible to coordinate the various multi-agency responses. For example, it was possible to communicate with and assist with utilities and agencies to rebuild damaged infrastructure, while at the same time providing resources for the rescue efforts. This effort was critical to re-establishing world financial access to the NYSE, AMEX, the Mercantile Exchange and NASDAQ as quickly as possible.

**Preparing for the unexpected – The Medical Syndromic Surveillance System** In order to effectively monitor and respond to bioterrorism, OEM and the City's Department of Health (DOH) have developed comprehensive monitoring systems. One critical component of New York City's bio-terrorism plan is the EMS/911 "Syndromic Surveillance" System. This system monitors 911 emergency system ambulance real-time response activity for any unusual increase in calls where patients experience specific symptoms. Through a computer program, OEM automatically tracks, categorizes, and compares the symptoms to retrospective data. The system provides the City with a tool where unusual medical activity is recognized and investigated to determine the cause. This system complements traditional detection methods which are dependent upon hospital and physician reporting to spot unusual activity or a trend.

Immediately after the attack on September 11<sup>th</sup> the Emergency Operations Center was activated to respond to the attack and its aftermath. From October 12<sup>th</sup> to November 9<sup>th</sup>, the City faced an additional attack – the anthrax letters sent to various locations in the City. The EOC operation had the added responsibility of coordinating activities with local, state and federal health agencies as well as local and federal law enforcement to address the anthrax threat. OEM coordinated points of dispensing (POD) of antibiotics to persons who were exposed at the NBC, ABC, and CBS studios, the New York Post

Building and Manhattan Eye and Ear Hospital. As part of its bio-plan, OEM has identified locations for PODs throughout the City to be activated in the event of a public health emergency to dispense medications to large numbers of people as quickly as possible. These local distribution centers allow the City to provide medication to the at risk population **before** people become sick. The Office of Emergency Management has developed a written manual on how to operate and manage these points of dispensing that is being considered by the CDC as a model for other jurisdictions around the nation. In fact, OEM had planned for a full exercise “TriPOD” utilizing the POD model that was scheduled for September 12, 2001. The United States Post Office has utilized this model to respond to the impact of anthrax tainted letters on postal employees.

### **LESSONS LEARNED FROM CITY’S RESPONSE TO THE ATTACK**

Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, the City’s emergency preparedness was among the best in the country. The plans, exercises, and drills that the City had prepared, conducted or participated in were fully utilized on the day of the attack. Using all these emergency preparations enabled the City to respond effectively and rapidly to the World Trade Center attack. The preparation enhanced the degree of communication between agencies, which was critical in addressing the myriad issues resulting from the attack.

We advise all localities, no matter how big or how small, to prepare for emergencies such as chemical and biological attacks by engaging in regular exercises and drills. Localities must commit their emergency plans to paper and critique each drill and actual incident to benefit from those experiences.

Many of the officials who visited New York City’s Emergency Operations Center would comment on how they wished they could afford to have such a facility. The reality is they can’t afford not to.

I believe as Mayor Giuliani and Police Commissioner do that one of the most essential elements in effectively protecting not only our City but every locality from terrorist attacks is communication and information sharing between federal, state, and local law authorities. Effective and comprehensive communication between all law enforcement entities is crucial in preventing and stopping future attacks and in planning for potential terrorist attacks. This information must be immediate and in real time so that the City can rapidly respond.

To further these goals, the Mayor has participated in creating a new multi-agency intelligence database between the New York Police Department, the Port Authority Police Department, the New Jersey Police Department and the New York State Police Department.

In addition, the City is a member of the New York Metropolitan Committee on Counter Terrorism that is comprised of the FBI, New York State Office of Public Security, and the Police Department. The purpose of this committee is to share intelligence, information regarding investigations, communicate information amongst its members, and to promote

joint training exercises. It will accomplish its mission through the work of five subcommittees:

1. Intelligence and Investigation;
  2. Communications;
- Public Safety;
- Incident Response; and
- Training.

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, the New York Police Department has increased the number of investigators assigned to the Joint Terrorist Task Force and we have made recommendations that additional agencies be included in the Task Force as well. Cities throughout the nation should also benefit from and utilize the Joint Terrorist Task Force. In closing, I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the City's response to the World Trade Center attacks and to again emphasize the crucial need of sharing of intelligence among federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities. An open flow of intelligence information is vital to the defense of our country. Also, additional funding for localities to conduct emergency preparedness drills will increase the country's preparedness to terrorism and to biological and chemical attacks.