Emergency Response to Chemical/Biological Terrorist Incidents

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The potential for chemical and biological weapon terrorist threats has added an entirely new dimension to the challenges faced by local municipal and industrial firefighting, security and emergency medical units. Since September 11th, most of our limited governmental resources have been focused on expanding the national security communications network to encourage a united and harmonious effort to enhance and coordinate security measures designed to prevent terrorist acts. However, in the event these fail, even more serious concerns exist in determining how to effectively respond to an actual event with the limited resources available. Inevitably, local emergency response resources will be the first to respond, but are in many respects and locations the least prepared to handle these types of incidents. However, even with these constraints, local response to a WMD event can be optimized by a good understanding of how standard response protocols should be altered to address the extraordinary hazards present.

Response aspects affected include:

- Scene safety and security
- Scene assessment and definition including toxicological considerations and information
- Intelligence information and sharing
- Pre-planning and multi-agency response/coordination
- Decontamination
- Psychogenic considerations

The paper will highlight the ways in which the classic hazardous material response model must be adapted to address the hazard peculiarities of a chemical or biological terrorist release event. Some comments will also be offered on the more likely type of WMD events based on present terrorist cell psychology and operating methods.