

State Office Reports

PHRST Words – THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

On March 15 a memorandum was sent to local health departments, from the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (PHP&R) requesting assistance with identifying unspent aid-to-county funds for SFY 02-03. The response has been super. We have received several telephone calls and e-mails as a result. What has also been very beneficial is the opportunity to speak directly to many of you about your plans for executing both '02-'03 funds and '03-'04 funds. There are some really fantastic efforts taking place across the state. Local health departments should be applauded for the fine work many of you are doing in developing and applying very solid preparedness and response programs and systems.

Thanks a bunch, and keep up the good work.

Douglas K. Griffin
PH Program Administrator

Bioterrorism – a Concern for ALL Nations

On March 17 and 18, PHP&R staff members Phil Benson and Douglas Griffin, and Pat Fugate of PHRST 6 attended the ATSDR/CDC-sponsored training, “Working Effectively with Tribal Governments.” The meeting covered tribal, federal, and state relationships; and tribal sovereignty, trust responsibility and cultural issues. Participants learned that there are more than 550 federally recognized tribes in the United States, meaning that these (550+) tribes have a special legal relationship with the United States – a government to government relationship.

Our purpose for attending the conference was to explore ways and opportunities for North Carolina’s tribal communities to become more involved and to more fully participate in preparedness and response for bioterrorism activities and initiatives. On the second day of the conference, Pat Fugate and Phil Benson presented on North Carolina’s preparedness and response activities, noting that tribal inclusion and involvement in training, planning and exercising has been successful.

Of Media and Men (and Women)

Let's say that the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response and the seven Public Health Regional Surveillance Teams are doing a better job of preparing, responding and surveying than any other state in the union. Do the people of North Carolina know it? Do they know that such tasks are part of the state's public health system? Do they care?

And what about the media? If there was a biological attack or a disease outbreak from whom would they prefer to get their information? A government official? Law enforcement? An elected official, perhaps?

Thanks to a survey commissioned by PHP&R and conducted during the last quarter of 2003 these and other questions can now be answered with certainty. Background, methodology and results of the survey will be presented at the PHRST Spring Quarterly Meeting on Wednesday, April 28. Be there or be woefully uninformed.

PHRST Spring Quarterly Meeting

If you were reading the previous blurb and suddenly remembered that you have not yet registered for this event, don't panic, it's not too late. This is actually a two-day event in Greenville that begins on April 27 with morning meetings scheduled for industrial hygienists and epi nurses. A low-impact, challenge ropes course is slated for that afternoon followed by dinner with a speaker. The sessions portion of the program begins on the morning of April 28 and lasts all day.

Participants eligible to attend the meeting should have already received a registration form via e-mail. To register, please e-mail or FAX the registration sheet to Linda White at linda.white@ncmail.net; FAX # 919-715-2246. If you have any questions regarding this event please e-mail Barbara Callahan at barbara.callahan@ncmail.net.

Staff Changes

Margaret Haas, the public health clinical pharmacist and SNS coordinator since PHP&R's inception has accepted a position with Kerr Healthcare as manager of the Long Term Care Pharmacy Section in Raleigh. Margaret's expertise, dedication and positive attitude will be greatly missed.

Regional Surveillance Teams



Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Edgecombe, Gates, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, Northampton, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, Washington and Wilson

Providing Respiratory Protection training and fit testing for the 25 northeastern counties has been a priority for first quarter of 2004. By the end of March staff in 17 counties will have received training on respiratory protection.

The Regional BT Lab – constructed offsite – has been delivered and the final onsite installations are in progress. The equipment for the laboratory has been delivered as well. A big thanks goes to Greg Benner, laboratory manager, for overseeing the laboratory development. Unfortunately for us, Greg left the BT lab to pursue a career in pharmaceutical sales. We wish him well and thank him for all the work he accomplished.

Three members attended the quarterly team conference in Raleigh, February 25-26. Frank Beck also attended a Response Planning seminar sponsored by the American Waterworks Association. Frank also provided a class on "Bioterrorism and Food Safety" for environmental health students at East Carolina University.

As PHRST 1 counties hire new BT planners, we are providing individualized orientation. We are very pleased that the background and experience of the BT coordinators is varied, a true strength for our region.

Providing consultation to local health departments concerning utilization of grant funds is an ongoing activity.

The Eastern RAC met in February and was well attended by public health staff from throughout the region.



Bladen, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wayne

Responding to suspicious substances and requests for planning have kept the team moving around our region since our last report. Counties are heavily involved in writing their response plans or hiring individuals to assist in the process. Once again an increased awareness of vulnerability is present in our region – prompted by local events and world tragedy.

The team also has been involved in consultation, interviews and interactions with responders. Partnerships that have been formed are now being actualized in response. This has increased our learning and demonstrated our value to the process.

Other team activities include SARS response planning, sampling training with the Hazardous Materials Regional Response Team, water emergency response training, and ICS training. The team assists in the selection of BT planners and their initial consults as they begin the process. We are encouraged by the quality of applicants and the enthusiasm they have shown. The team is meeting with each county individually to present the SNS template and to offer suggestions on its use.



Alleghany, Ashe, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Montgomery, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin

PHRST 5 is working with the Central Branch and Area 9 of NC Division of Emergency Management, among others, to assist in planning and conducting an exercise involving three counties in our region. The exercise will consist of an emerging zoonotic disease that affects the agricultural industry and the human population simultaneously. Local responders from all three counties are planning to participate and public health officials will be involved. Planning for the exercises began on March 22 and the series of exercises will be completed by December. The PHTIN training on avian influenza will be presented at orientation

sessions in all three counties prior to conducting a tabletop exercise. Representatives from the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and PHRST 5 will be at all three orientation sessions to answer questions. The tabletop will be followed by a functional exercise that will include decontamination, isolation, quarantine, and other activities to meet the local objectives of the exercise. It is possible that PHRST 5 will be participating in other planning sessions regarding local exercises that may occur in other emergency management areas within our region.

Effective February 1, PHRST 5 reached a contractual agreement with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro that establishes a graduate research assistantship in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Under the agreement, the UNCG Department of Geography provides the services of a graduate student at 0.5 FTE to assist PHRST 5 on GIS-related projects. The student, Rebecca (Becky) Renken, is working toward a masters in applied geography. Becky is now working with PHRST 5 on several projects.

Becky is acquiring and organizing map layers that will be appropriate for a regional profile such as sociodemographic characteristics, farms, locations of first responders, potential terrorist targets, etc. We plan to include numerous maps in the regional profile document that is produced.

In addition to graphs and tabular presentation of data, we plan to present maps showing the distribution of reportable diseases geographically within our region. The current version of the Reportable Disease File that we have only allows for mapping at the county and city levels, but we have requested a detailed version that contains the addresses of cases. This will allow us to geocode the data to the street level and will give us much more flexibility in the analysis and presentation of the data. (Note that Dr. Jean-Marie Maillard now has CD data disks available for all seven PHRSTs. Contact him to make arrangements to get the data for your region.)

The RNACT planning committee is writing plans to develop the capacity to conduct rapid needs assessments in the event of a natural disaster without relying on CDC assistance. One of the challenges for the EPI Section is to find a method of randomly selecting housing units for surveying to then generate maps for the field teams. Becky investigated this issue and has come up with a creative solution using ArcGIS software. Using her method the Epi Team could randomly select all the housing units to be surveyed, generate a set of instructions giving the most efficient route for getting to those housing units, and produce maps and navigation instructions for each survey team. Good work, Becky!



Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Yancey

PHRST 6 members have been busy participating in drills and exercises. The team assisted Mission Hospitals (Buncombe County) and Murphy Medical Center (Cherokee County) with functional exercises for JCAHO, and participated in tabletops in Burke County and the Unifour region (Catawba, Burke, Alexander, and Caldwell counties). PHRSTs 5, 6, and 7 will be working together on the latter. PHRST 6 is also assisting planning for Buncombe County, Transylvania County, Toe River District (Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties), and Haywood County exercises. We are working on a scenario bank for public health-friendly scenarios.

SAR is coming! No, not SARS, but the Western NC Search and Rescue Event in Haywood County, March 31-April 4. PHRST 6 members will join our EM and other first responder counterparts for the second year to see how ICS is really done in a wilderness search and rescue event. All PHRST/PHPR staff are welcome. Check www.ncem.org for registration materials. Expect lots of camping, hiking, and industrial-strength food.

PHRST 6 welcomes Debbie Gilbert, MATRAC's (Mountain Area Trauma Regional Advisory Committee) new bioterrorism coordinator. Debbie is from Polk County and brings a wealth of experience in EM, EMS, and training, including Basic Law Enforcement Training and ICS.

Martha Salyers and Mary Edwards attended the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta, February 29-March 3. Both agree that their brains were completely stuffed with information on laboratory issues, emerging diseases, surveillance networks, and much more. Both enjoyed quality time with the sizable North Carolina contingent.

PHRST 6 welcomes Hope Burch, the new project supervisor for the Cherokee/Clay/Macon Medical Reserve Corps Project. Hope is a resident of Clay County, and is a health educator with a background in communications. She will be organizing retired or otherwise inactive health professionals to assist in disasters and work with health departments on an ongoing basis in the three counties.

PHRST 6 continues to network with our friends across the borders (PHRST 6's region borders three states): Martha is a member of MEPHECC, the Mountain Empire Public Health Emergency Coordination Council, a tri-state group of public health disaster planners from North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Issues recently discussed include SNS plans and drills, risk communication training, veterinary issues, and Medical Reserve Corps. There were 30 attendees from four states at the last meeting. PHRST 6 also plans to meet with our counterparts in Georgia and South Carolina this spring.

Forensic Epi is alive and well! Buncombe, Cherokee, and Haywood counties now have active forensic epidemiology working groups that include law enforcement, county government, EM, EMS, public health, hospitals, physicians, attorneys, veterinarians, and others.

Martha has given talks recently to EMS staff and family practice residents and is slated to speak to the NC Nurse Practitioners' conference in April and to UNC-Asheville students in a "Political Terrorism" class. She was the course director for the Terrence Lee Memorial Infectious Disease Conference in Asheville on March 26, where Dr. Jeff Engel was the keynote speaker.

Pat Fugate recently attended a special session of the Region 4 USET (United Southeast Tribes) sponsored by the CDC Special Projects Office and ATSDR in Ft. Lauderdale with Phillip Benson and Douglas Griffin, where they discussed BT planning and funding issues with Southeast tribal members and other partners.

Wendy has been busy with the NC National Guard's Civilian Support Team, the Guard's HazMat team which is available to support North Carolina HazMat teams in disasters. Congratulations to Wendy on becoming a member of this demanding and prestigious team!

Mary Edwards, regional lab specialist for the western Regional State Lab for Public Health, is getting closer daily to actually occupying her lab in the Buncombe County Health Center. The Biological Safety Cabinet and HVAC System are being tested and the Magna Pure has been installed. As soon as proper air balance is achieved the lab can be occupied. Susan Padgett, MT(ASCP) has accepted the position as medical laboratory technologist I and will be joining Mary on April 1.

PHRST 6 has provided Public Health ICS training in Macon and Cherokee counties. Cherokee actually had a real-life potential disease outbreak that was reported during the training, and we made it one of our scenarios. (Fortunately, it wasn't a real outbreak!)



Alexander, Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union

In Region 7 the year 2004 began with counties placing an emphasis on examining their bioterrorism and emergency response plans. Several counties have requested PHRST 7 to present information and guidance about the NC Public Health Response Protocol as well as participate in meetings where counties are planning tabletop exercises.

Public Health Response Protocol:

- **On January 5, PHRST 7 met** with emergency response personnel in Cabarrus County to present an overview of PHRST 7's activities and its role in bioterrorism response. A detailed discussion of the Public Health Response Protocol was given. The regional laboratorian as well as the regional veterinarian with the Department of Agriculture, Emergency Program Division also gave presentations to the Cabarrus County emergency responders.
- **On March 2, the PHRST 7 team** and representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Postal Inspector Office, and the regional laboratory met with regional health directors and their staff to provide an extensive overview of the Public Health Response Protocol.

Exercises:

- Catawba, Alexander, Caldwell, and Burke counties are developing a tabletop exercise that will take place March 24. PHRST 7 and PHRST 6 teams are involved with planning and participating in this exercise.
- Mecklenburg County is developing a tabletop exercise named "Summer Storm," which is scheduled to take place June 22nd. This exercise is somewhat unique in that it will run a continuous 36 hours, with the idea of testing all shifts in responding agencies. PHRST 7 is heavily involved with the planning of this exercise and will participate in the exercise.
- The PHRST 7 team also has been involved with the planning for the Catawba Nuclear Power Plant exercise scheduled for March 16th. The PHRST 7 involvement focuses on the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) interest in how counties will distribute potassium iodine (KI) during a radiation release and efforts pertaining to past and current KI distribution efforts.

The coming months should prove interesting as counties work through their exercises and test their response plans. The PHRST 7 expects to be actively involved with these exercises as planners, participants, and evaluators. The counties and the PHRST team will benefit greatly from these experiences.

Editor's Note:

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information briefs that are useful and timely. It is designed to be scanned quickly to determine topics of interest and then provide pertinent information in two or three paragraphs. The primary contributors to the newsletter are the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response and the state's seven Public Health Regional Surveillance Teams. This is because the PHRST Line Report is one of our primary communication tools as well as an historical record of our efforts. Topics submitted by counties, partners and stakeholders are also welcome as they pertain to bioterrorism and natural outbreak preparedness. Submissions should be e-mailed to our editor at Bill.Furney@ncmail.net.

This newsletter is also posted at <http://www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/phpr/newsletters.html>.

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