

## Ohio EPA Could Play an Important Role in the War on Terrorism

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It's no secret that the war on terrorism is being waged on many fronts. But did you know that Ohio EPA is one of them? Ohio EPA's Evidence Response Team (ERT) is prepared to respond to potential weapons of mass destruction (WMD) events anywhere in Ohio. The team's primary roles are to assist lead response agencies in processing WMD crime scenes, and to secure evidence and assess environmental impacts that result from such incidents.

The ERT is a technical support resource and will not assume lead agency or incident command responsibilities during a WMD incident. Kevin Clouse, who manages the Emergency Response (ER), Office of Special Investigations (OSI) and Site Investigative Field Unit teams, realized the need for a highly trained response team after the events of 9/11. Kevin explained that "the demand for Ohio EPA to prepare and train for terrorism events was extremely high. We needed a team of individuals who have a high level of training and experience in assessing and working in contaminated environments, collecting criminal evidence and working in stressful conditions. Our investigators from the Office of Special Investigations were the best fit."

### ***Serious Training Required***

Ohio EPA's ERT team is comprised of 10 members from OSI and one from the Division of Hazardous Waste Management. All members are volunteers with extensive training and experience in assessing and working in contaminated environments. They are qualified to wear the highest level (Level A) of personal protective equipment and enter into the most contaminated work zones (hot zones).

Members are trained in areas such as collecting and preserving criminal evidence, gathering information and/or evidence to assist in incident response, selecting and properly using personal protective equipment (including breathing apparatus) and personal decontamination procedures. Members also receive training in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, response to nuclear, biological and chemical events and environmental multi-media response activities.

Additionally, team members must pass Ohio EPA's self-contained breathing apparatus training and be medically cleared to wear the equipment.

### ***What the ERT Does***

Ohio EPA's Evidence Response and Emergency Response teams are closely tied; at least one ER On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) would be involved in a response to a WMD incident and offer the ERT as a resource to Incident Command.

The OSC typically represents Ohio EPA in an advisory/coordination role relating to environmental contamination assessment, mitigation and recovery. They also are the liaison with the ERT. In addition, an OSC from each district cross-trains with the ERT to assist in deployment and operations. Although qualified, the OSCs would not join the entry team working in a contaminated environment except under extraordinary circumstances.

In the event of a terrorism incident that requires deployment of the team, Ohio EPA's duty officer or the OSC will notify the ERT leader, who will in turn notify all members of the team. Upon being notified of a WMD event, the team will begin to assess the situation while en route. They will work closely with agencies such as local first responders, the Ohio Department of Health, U.S. EPA, FBI and others, to determine their role in the response and how to fit into the chain of command structure.

The team can assess environmental impacts of the WMD incident and help conduct hazard evaluations to determine exposure risks, as well as select proper levels of protection. The OSC will pass environmental impact information through the chain of command to aid in the decision-making process about preventing the contamination of surrounding areas.

"Basically, these are the same things we have been doing for years in working with hazardous chemicals, only now we need to be more prepared for an all-hazards approach. We are constantly evaluating new detection equipment and training in the proper use and maintenance of the equipment we purchase," said Bill Palmer, the ERT team leader. "The



**ERT members prepare for a full-scale exercise at the Orient Correctional Facility.**

ERT can also help secure the scene to assist the lead response agencies to identify, collect and preserve criminal evidence, including samples. If federal agency resources are tied up elsewhere, the team is available to help the incident commander stabilize the situation until federal resources arrive. In addition, they can assist U.S. EPA with decontamination and environmental sampling and monitoring to assess exposure hazards.

***Beyond WMD***

The ERT isn't just sitting around waiting for a WMD disaster. They're already involved with counter-terrorism activities, such as the State of Ohio Security Task Force and its various subcommittees, WMD grant applications and a wide range of meetings with local, state and federal agencies. And they have helped plan and participated in many full-scale WMD exercises involving local, state and federal agencies.

For more information about Ohio's Homeland Security efforts, [visit the Department of Public Safety's Homeland Security Web site.](#)