



Delivering for America

Ten years ago, the face of America was forever changed. The Sept. 11 attacks stripped us of the confident feeling that we were safe and secure against attack here at home. The days that followed simply magnified that uneasy feeling. As we analyzed and contemplated what to do in the future, we regrouped and planned how to prevent disaster and how to respond if our preventative measures failed.

One of those long-term plans involved asking ourselves what we would do in the event of a biological attack. The planners of that response mechanism turned to the U.S. Post Office and the deployment of you, the volunteers from the letter carrier craft, to deliver precious countermeasures to the homes of the customers we serve.

On Feb. 18, 2004, a memorandum of agreement was signed by Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, Postmaster General John Potter and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Tom Ridge. The agreement memorialized the intent as follows:

...The purpose of this [agreement] is to establish policies and procedures to assist an affected State(s) in the delivery of antibiotics from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) and information material to the general population affected by an act of biological terrorism where the Secretary of HHS declares a public health emergency and/or the event is so significant that the President declares an emergency under the Stafford Act...HHS and DHS seek the assistance of the USPS in the delivery of antibiotics from the SNS and information material to the general population...

USPS and HHS conducted proof-of-concept drills in conjunction with state and local officials (without personal protective equipment, or PPE), in Seattle on Nov. 11, 2006, in Philadelphia June 23-24, 2007, and in Boston Sept. 22-23, 2007. The drills tested the postal delivery function as well as the distribution of medications (mock packages and literature) from a local repository to USPS DU.

In 2008, HHS and USPS paused all CRI-related postal planning beyond strategic security approval (the step prior to actual deployment in a city) while a pilot could be conducted in Minneapolis/St. Paul. This pilot included a subset of the desired Minneapolis and St. Paul footprint (roughly 25 percent): 205,000 residences, 14 post offices

and 468 carrier routes. The pilot worked and it was left to the powers that be to determine what to do next.

On Dec. 30, 2009, President Obama issued Executive Order (EO) #13527 on the matter of delivery of those medical countermeasures following a biological attack. The EO, in part, provides that:

...The U.S. Postal Service has the capacity for rapid residential delivery of medical countermeasures for self administration across all communities in the United States. The Federal Government shall pursue a national U.S. Postal Service medical countermeasures dispensing model to respond to a large-scale biological attack....

In furtherance of the above goal, the EO went on to require the following:

...The Secretaries of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security, in coordination with the U.S. Postal Service, within 180 days of the date of this order, shall establish a national U.S. Postal Service medical countermeasures dispensing model for U.S. cities to respond to a large-scale biological attack, with anthrax as the primary threat consideration....

You, the postal family, have been chosen as the messengers to deliver the necessary counter-measures.

The second city to go on line is Louisville. The rollout process has been in place for about one year and involves many local and state agencies working together with the HHS as well as the Post Office.

The Louisville plan calls for deployment in 23 of the 38 ZIP codes in the Louisville area. Delays were caused by some of the funding battles that were so prominent in Congress this year. Louisville is a go, although the future funding issues have not been fully mapped out.

Branch 14 President Alan Harris and his officers have been actively involved in all phases of the preparation. They have kept an eye on all of the local events, making sure that our interests are protected. In one of the most recent phases, we needed to make sure that the postal vehicles in our fleet were able to perform the necessary tasks. The USPS has the necessary vehicles to retrieve the antibiotics from the distribution center and get them to the designated stations for delivery to the customers, and we have or will train the necessary drivers from the volunteers recruited.

You deliver for America!

