



'Another form of service'

Carriers prepared to deliver in case of bioterror attack

At an April 17 hearing before the House Homeland Security Committee, Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. warned Congress that the role of letter carriers in delivering antibiotics or other medication straight to American homes after a bioterror attack would be diminished by the end of door-to-door delivery.

"Let us serve America—at your porch," Peralta told the panel.

Letter carriers in six communities are participating in the Cities' Readiness Initiative, which involves delivery of medicines directly to residents in the event of a biological incident. Peralta explained to the committee how the federal government under President George W. Bush had turned to letter carriers, and the Postal Service's unique house-to-house universal network, to protect Americans. The Cities' Readiness Initiative, Peralta said, was envisioned in 2003 as a way to protect people without requiring them to leave their homes by delivering medical supplies within 48 hours.

"No other entity had a network capable of carrying out such a mission," he said. "Letter carriers were ideally suited for such a complex task. No one knows the neighborhoods like letter carriers."

The hearing followed closely on the heels of an exercise involving the Cities' Readiness Initiative in Louisville, KY, that staged a response to a truck containing biological agents. The Louisville response plan calls for delivery of vital medical supplies to as many as 750,000 people. The federal government would fly the supplies from a central depository to postal facilities. Every home would receive 20 pills—enough for a family of four to use for five days—along with a flier explaining how to use them.

According to Louisville Branch 14 President Allen Harris, 60 percent of Louisville's letter carriers volunteered to participate. In an actual biological crisis, participating letter carriers would

receive preventive medicines and other protections before going out on their routes, but they could still face considerable risk to their health.

"It just makes you feel very proud," Allen said about his branch's participation, "because you're doing something that's going to help the community."

Peralta told the committee that carriers were used to logistical challenges like the Cities' Readiness Initiative. "This type of planning is nothing new to the Postal Service or to letter carriers," he said. "We look upon this not as a chore, but as another form of service."

On May 6, several hundred letter carriers from Minneapolis Branch 9 and St. Paul, MN Branch 28 participated in a full-scale test of the postal segment of the Cities' Readiness Initiative in the Twin Cities area, delivering empty pill bottles and information fliers about the program to 37,000 homes in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Golden Valley (see *Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine's column, page 47*).

For the exercise, named "Operation Medicine Delivery," participating letter carriers were assigned a special "CRI" route, paired with a law-enforcement escort, assigned a vehicle and given empty pill bottles and fliers for every delivery point on their routes. Their progress was monitored by a variety of agencies. All deliveries, which began early Sunday morning, were completed by 3:30 p.m. that day.

Delivery of medicines is designed to keep citizens safely at home at the first sign of a bioterror incident. Television and radio broadcasts in the affected area would tell postal patrons about the deliveries and urge them to remain at home. Staying home reduces exposure to biological agents and helps prevent incidents involving panic. Letter carriers who volunteer for the program and qualify after screening for conditions such as allergies to medication are provided with preventive antibiotics to protect them during the delivery. ☒



Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. testified at a congressional hearing on the Cities' Readiness Initiative on April 17.

Below and at top: Volunteers from Minneapolis Branch 9 and St. Paul Branch 28 partnered with members of law enforcement during "Operation Medicine Delivery" on Sunday, May 6.

