DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC Recommendations for Civilian Communities Near Chemical Weapons Depots: Guidelines for Medical Preparedness

AGENCY: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Public Health Service, HHS.

ACTION: Publication of final recommendations.

SUMMARY: On July 27, 1994, CDC published in the Federal Register, 59 FR 38191, "CDC Recommendations for **Civilian Communities Near Chemical** Weapons Depots: Guidelines for Medical Preparedness" and requested public comment. Seven people sent comments; many were responding on behalf of governments or other institutions in affected communities. These comments are available upon request. These recommendations incorporate changes made in response to the comments received and constitutes CDC's final recommendations for minimum standards for prehospital and hospital emergency medical services' readiness in communities near the eight locations where the U.S. stockpile of lethal chemical weapons is stored. The eight locations are: Umatilla Army Depot Activity, Oregon; Tooele Army Depot, Utah; Pueblo Army Depot Activity, Colorado; Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas; Newport Army Ammunition Plant, Indiana; Anniston Army Depot, Alabama; Lexington Bluegrass Depot Activity, Kentucky; and Edgewood Area, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

These recommendations were prepared to assist emergency planners in determining emergency medical services' readiness in communities near the 8 locations where the U.S. stockpile of lethal chemical weapons is stored. These guidelines should not be used for any purpose other than planning for the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

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I. Executive Summary

In 1985, Congress mandated that unitary chemical warfare agents be destroyed in such a manner as to provide maximum protection for the environment, the public, and personnel involved in destroying the agents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was delegated review and oversight responsibility for any Department of the Army (DA) plans to dispose of or transport chemical weapons (Public Law 91–121 and 91– 441, Armed Forces Appropriation Authorization of 1970 and 1971).

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve medical preparedness within the medical sector of civilian communities surrounding chemical agent depots, CDC has developed the following medical preparedness and response guidelines. These guidelines represent minimum standards of medical preparedness for civilian communities that might be exposed to chemical warfare agents during the incineration or storage process. These guidelines were developed in cooperation with a panel of recognized experts in the fields of emergency medicine, disaster preparedness, nursing, chemical warfare preparedness, and the prehospital emergency medical system.

II. Background

In 1985, Congress mandated that unitary chemical warfare agents be destroyed in such a manner as to provide maximum protection for the environment, the public, and the personnel involved in destroying the agents. This mandate was further defined in the Department of Defense (DOD) Authorization Act of 1986, Pub. L. 99–145. Consistent with its desire to promote the most environmentally safe method of destroying chemical agents, the National Research Council determined that incineration is the best method for disposing of the weapons (1). In 1988, the Authorization Act was amended to permit DA to set up a prototype incineration facility on Johnston Island in the Pacific in order to verify the safety of such an operation. To date, more than 700,000 pounds of chemical agent have been safely incinerated there.

CDC was delegated the responsibility of reviewing and overseeing any DA plans to dispose of or transport chemical weapons (Pub. L. 91–121 and 91–441, Armed Forces Appropriation Authorization of 1970 and 1971). In addition, an interagency agreement between CDC and DA requires CDC to provide technical assistance to the DA in protecting the public health in nearby communities during the destruction of unitary chemical agents and weapon systems.

Currently, large quantities of chemical warfare agents are stored in eight facilities ¹ in the continental United States. These chemical stockpiles consist primarily of nerve agents, mustard agents, or a combination of both. In Tooele, Utah, construction of the chemical agent incinerator is now complete, and destruction of the weapons and chemicals in this depot is scheduled to begin in the Fall of 1995. To improve the ability of local health care personnel to handle emergencies related to a chemical agent release, CDC has presented medical preparedness courses to civilian medical personnel on sites adjacent to the 8 chemical weapons depots on 13 occasions. Emergency physicians, nurses, internists, surgeons, hospital administrators, and prehospital emergency medical responders have attended these courses.

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve medical readiness in civilian communities surrounding chemical agent depots, CDC developed medical preparedness and response guidelines. These guidelines represent minimum standards for medical preparedness in civilian communities that might be inadvertently exposed to chemical warfare agents during the incineration or storage process. These guidelines were developed in cooperation with a working group of recognized experts in the fields of emergency medicine, disaster preparedness, nursing, chemical stockpile emergency preparedness, and prehospital emergency medical systems. These guidelines do not supersede current medical or public health practices and requirements (e.g., precautions for handling bodily fluids). Local health and emergency management officials, working with Army personnel, must analyze the nature of possible releases at each location, determine what kinds of intoxication and what level of contamination might be possible, and match local or regional resources to the potential task.

¹Umatilla Army Depot Activity, Oregon; Tooele Army Depot, Utah, Pueblo Army Depot Activity, Colorado; Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas; Newport Army Ammunition Plant, Indiana; Anniston Army Depot, Alabama; Lexington-Bluegrass Depot Activity, Kentucky; and Edgewood Area, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.