

Washington RRT Annual Exercise: Intentional Contamination of Dry Cereal Product with Ricin

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Exercise Summary

In June 2019, the Washington Rapid Response Team (WA RRT) co-hosted with FDA Office of Human and Animal Food Division 6-West and the FDA Pacific Northwest Laboratory a multi-day training focused on intentional contamination of a dry cereal product with ricin.

The hands-on training was delivered in conjunction with ICS Operations Section Chief (OSC) position-specific training utilizing the FEMA curriculum (L0958).

The goals of the multi-day training were to:

- Build ICS Operations Section Chief knowledge within the WA RRT
- Review WA RRT activation procedures and apply process to overall operational rhythm of a response
- Increase awareness of WA RRT mobile Incident Command Post (ICP) resources through hands-on deployment
- Continually improve WA RRT response capability through a formal after-action process

The training included representation from 12 state (including two additional RRT states) and seven Federal entities.

Scenario Overview

The 3-day ICS OSC position-specific training followed the standardized FEMA curriculum with examples and tabletop exercise scenarios rooted in all-hazards and food/feed-related subjects.

The final exercise and drill scenario focused on intentional insider contamination of a dry cereal product with ricin. Several illnesses and deaths were reported and WA RRT was activated to work in conjunction with appropriate response partners such as FDA and FBI.

Review of the current WA RRT activation process was conducted and copies of the appropriate operations manual chapter was provided to participants as a “quick reference” both during the exercise and after.

Hands-on components included mobilization and de-mobilization of WA RRT mobile ICP equipment and supplies in order to support an initial incident briefing.

Six groups then worked through the operational planning process for the next operational period and addressed realistic injects that were issued approximately every five minutes.

The exercise concluded with an operational briefing according to the Planning “P” process, demobilization of the mobile ICP equipment, and an all-participant after-action review.

New Contacts Identified

Providing an all-hazards, externally advertised ICS component to the WA RRT annual exercise brought in new perspectives and a broader range of response best-practices and lessons learned.

These novel contacts included representatives from:

- Indiana Dept. of Health
- Michigan Dept. of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Eastern Washington University
- WA State Department of Social and Health Services Emergency Repatriation Program
- WA State Department of Transportation Emergency Management
- WA State Department of Corrections
- FDA Produce Safety Network
- U.S. Coast Guard Reserves



Photos 3 and 4. Exercise initial incident and operational briefings.



Photo 5. WA RRT annual exercise participants



Photos 1 and 2. Deployment of mobile ICP shelter, HVAC unit, generators, and LED site lighting.

Mobile ICP Equipment/Supply Item
Tie downs/ weights for mobile ICP tent when deployed on pavement
Equipment trailer for rapid deployment of large equipment quantities
Trailer jacks
Trailer wheel chocks
ICP perimeter caution tape
Exhaust venting for RRT vehicle
Portable easels
Backup batteries for off-grid/solar power source
Additional tarps to cover equipment when set up but not currently in use
Additional work gloves for storage on RRT vehicle
Wheel kits for gasoline inverter generators
Trash cans and bags for ICP site cleanliness
Insulated liner for mobile ICP tent
Additional mobile HVAC unit for second mobile ICP tent

Table 1. List of additional required supplies/equipment after real-time deployment of the mobile ICP.

Lessons Learned-Strengths

- Tying in the WA RRT activation procedures with the FEMA OSC curriculum allowed participants to better understand RRT’s role in a large response with a law enforcement component.
- Novel contacts were able to have specific law enforcement-related questions answered by FBI partners, including questions around food sampling as part of evidence collection.
- The entirety of the mobile ICP equipment was deployed to an operational status within 30 minutes.
- Hands-on training with the equipment was identified as very helpful, both from a multi-agency collaboration standpoint and for solidifying the ICS training objectives.
- ICS position specific training opportunities continue to be sought after by all-hazards responders inside and outside of the food/feed arena.

Lessons Learned-Areas of Improvement

An in-person After Action Review was held immediately following the exercise. In addition, an online survey was sent out to participants following the training. Some of the identified areas of improvement included:

- Need to better identify, recruit, and retire WA RRT “core members”
- Exercises to date have not greatly touched upon scenarios where routine communication between WSDA, FDA, and others was not available and other options (satellite phones, GETS cards, etc.) were required.
- Real-time deployment of mobile ICP equipment to a functional status allowed for additional required supplies/equipment to be identified (see **Table 1**).
- Equipment cache travel cases/bins need to be better labeled for more efficient staging and deployment once they arrive on-scene.
- Need for more detailed location maps of the WA RRT equipment caches throughout WA State.

Contact Information

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