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Private Sector Tabletop Exercise Report

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The New Jersey Business Force is a non-profit, non-partisan consortium of companies and institutions dedicated to improving Homeland Security through effective Public-Private partnerships.
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INTRODUCTION

Three main threats confront Americans today: Manmade, Natural and Technological. Like Heracles in his epic struggle against the Hydra, the manmade threat seemingly has many heads – domestic, international, environmental, criminal, religious, and disaffected loners. Complicating our prevention and mitigation efforts is the specter of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) employed by one or more of these disparate groups. The use of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosives (CBRNE) agents and materials presents significant preparatory, response, mitigation and recovery/restoration challenges for both the Public and Private Sectors.

No preventive strategy, large-scale response or recovery effort can exclude the potential contributions of the Private Sector – commercial, non-profit and faith-based. Local, state and Federal governments are attempting to close identified gaps in the nation’s security network and response systems but invariably vulnerabilities will remain. Neither government nor the Private Sector can achieve, by themselves, the irrefutable goal of enhanced preparedness and security.

Government emergency management and security efforts have the best chance for success when Private Sector cooperation and collaboration is involved. Only through joint initiatives and mutual collaboration will our citizenry be more secure against all threats - particularly those posed by terrorists. Effective Public-Private partnerships necessitate information exchanges, coordination and integrated capabilities. Thus, Homeland Security Presidential Decision Directive 5 dated 2-28-03, states:

“The Federal Government recognizes the role that the private and nongovernmental sectors play in preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies. The Secretary (Secretary of Homeland Security) will coordinate with the private and nongovernmental sectors to ensure adequate planning, equipment, training, and exercise activities and to promote partnerships to address incident management capabilities.” (HSPDD #5, paragraph 7)

The Private Sector’s record of innovation and proven business practices makes it a valued Public Sector partner.

An overarching goal of the Emergency Preparedness Conference Private Sector Tabletop Exercise was to transition Homeland Security Presidential Directive Number 5 from concept to application by crafting a template for effective Public-Private Sector partnerships. The exercise itself presented a unique opportunity for determining what direction Public-Private Sector partnerships should take and how to overcome obstacles to unified action.

PRIVATE SECTOR ROUNDTABLE OBJECTIVES

Assembling successful Public-Private coalitions and partnerships was the central theme of the Private Sector Tabletop Exercise. With this end state in mind, exercise development and execution was guided by eight objectives:

1. Comprehend the challenges presented by catastrophic bio-terrorism or natural occurring pandemic events.

2. Clarify and delineate the possible roles the Private Sector may be called upon to perform during bio-terror or natural occurring pandemic events.
3. Identify the prerequisites for forming new and constructive partnerships between the Public and Private Sectors.

4. Propose ways to eliminate obstacles to viable, fully functioning Public-Private Sector partnerships.

5. Devise strategies to facilitate information sharing and access to Private Sector capabilities.

6. Explore Private Sector decision making processes employed during emergencies and the internal and external pathways used to communicate time sensitive decisions.

7. Assess measures the Private Sector can adopt to improve homeland security preparedness.

8. Demonstrate why the Private Sector is integral to the nation’s homeland security efforts.

**BIO-TERROR SCENARIO ASSUMPTIONS**

The tabletop exercise scenario was derived from eight broad planning assumptions presumed applicable to bio-terror events. Private sector companies, institutions and organizations may find these assumptions relevant for their own internal exercises and preparedness efforts.

**Assumption 1** – A high incidence of death and illness among the general population will have significant primary and secondary impacts on Private Sector activities and continuity of operations.

**Assumption 2** – The potential for virulent pathogens to spread infection will raise serious concerns among the Private Sector workforce and lead to unanticipated consequences.

**Assumption 3** – A catastrophic bio-event will quickly deplete local and state medical stockpiles, overwhelm emergency medical services and trigger the deployment of the Strategic National Stockpile.

**Assumption 4** – Any decision by government to issue quarantine or isolation orders or strictly enforce emergency declarations during a bio-terror event will directly affect day-to-day business operations.

**Assumption 5** - The Private Sector will need accurate, timely, reliable and actionable information from credible sources to protect workers and their families and modify business operations in response to emergency measures implemented by local and state governments.

**Assumption 6** – A catastrophic biological event will produce an aggressive public affairs response to offset a lack of information, counter rumors and allay fears among the public and first response community.

**Assumption 7** – Damage to physical infrastructure will generally be minimal; however, unprotected persons will suffer grievous health and psychological affects.
Assumption 8 - Many untreated victims of a major bio-terror event will die or experience long-term medical conditions and disabilities.

PRIVATE SECTOR ROUNDTABLE METHODOLOGY

Preventing attacks on critical infrastructure was not the purpose of the Private Sector Tabletop Exercise. Rather, the prevailing premise of the Private Sector Tabletop Exercise was how to protect the intended target of a biological release: the general population and the American Way of Life.

A principal theme of the Private Sector Tabletop exercise was an intentional release of Y. pestis (pneumonic plague) and a subsequent statewide public health emergency. The plague scenario itself was adapted from the National Planning Scenarios - #4 and modified to elicit reactions by attendees whether Public or Private Sector. The National Planning Scenarios publication contains a systematic planning framework consisting of 15 all-hazards scenarios and portrays the potential scope, magnitude, and complexity of incidents of national significance.

The National Planning Scenarios document seeks to improve homeland security preparedness by creating an array of flexible capabilities. The stated goal of these scenarios is to “...identify the potential scope, magnitude, and complexity of potential major events.” (Introduction, pg ii, National Planning Scenarios, April 2005)

Scenario-based methodologies stimulate constructive discussion and generate unique solutions to difficult problems. There are no “school solutions” for the hypothetical situations presented. Although artificialities exist and certain aspects of the scenario may be viewed with skepticism, the overall premise is conceivable and realistic.

In total, the Private Sector Tabletop Exercise format featured five distinct modules:

- Module 1 – Mitigation and Preparedness
- Module 2 – Scenario
- Module 3 – Response
- Module 4 – Recovery and Restoration
- Module 5 – Summary and Recap

Homeland Security Presidential Decision Directive #5 calls for private sector inclusion in planning, training, exercises, and operations but fulfilling the mandate is proving much harder than originally thought. A “Catch-22” situation inherent within Homeland Security creates a frustrating conundrum: the Private Sector is tying to ascertain its actual role in Homeland Security while the Public Sector is resigned to integrating the Private Sector into the Homeland Security network but is having trouble determining how.

Against this backdrop, the exercise facilitator posed a series of penetrating questions to elicit discussion, participant insights and foster group brainstorming based on dilemmas contained within the exercise scenario. The tabletop sought an open and honest examination of the issues affecting Public-Private Sector partnerships. The questions asked of participants are available in Annex A of this report.
EXERCISE SCENARIO

Universal Adversary (UA) operatives supported by a network of resident sympathizers conduct a covert biological attack against mass transportation systems servicing Northern New Jersey and New York City. Aerosolized Y. pestis is released inside terminals and stations at Newark Liberty International Airport, Newark Penn Station, Jersey City Port-Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) Line and the Hoboken Light Rail station. Use of a biological agent is intended to cause serious loss of life and sow panic among the citizenry. The group’s grand goal is to paralyze the Northeast and cripple the American economy by targeting key conveyances, transit hubs and population centers within the New Jersey-New York metropolitan region.

The release of Y. pestis takes place during the early morning darkness of a Sunday morning and primarily in restrooms away from the gaze of security cameras. Carefully rehearsed diversions permit dissemination in other heavily used public areas as well. New Jersey and, indirectly, New York City, are attacked while unsuspecting victims sleep. It will be another two days before the full implications of this horrific act is felt.

The Universal Adversary group carefully timed their attack to coincide with events taking place in the Metropolitan Area. There was a crucial NY Giants home game at the Meadowlands. Balmy fall temperatures bring near-record crowds outdoors for highly publicized attractions, sightseeing and special entertainment on both sides of the Hudson River.

New Jersey will quickly become the epicenter for an event with international reach. As a result of foreign and domestic travel, pneumonic plague will be confirmed in eleven countries, the United States, Puerto Rico and Canada by the fourth day of the event.

The first victim of the biological attack, a nine-month old, is hospitalized in Jersey City on Day 1 following the release. By the afternoon of Day 2, a small number of victims begin presenting themselves at doctor offices and medical centers in Essex, Hudson and Union Counties. Due to the generalized nature of the symptoms exhibited, diagnosis of the plague is delayed until epidemiological assessments reveal a spike in related cases.

The victim count accelerates in earnest on Day 3. Fatalities run 5.5 times above those reported as ill. The young and elderly are especially vulnerable. Evidentiary analysis portends an anomalous event of major significance. New York City is also experiencing a similar bow wave of sick and dead. Dreading the worst, the medical community sounds the alarm.

The news media demands answers from governmental sources but only receives carefully crafted press statements in return. Coverage of the mystery illness all but pushes other news from the headlines. Meanwhile, the state leadership huddles with senior health officials to review preliminary but inconclusive epidemiological data. All indicators point to a catastrophic emergency in the making.

The New Jersey State Emergency Operations Center is fully staffed by mid-morning on Day 3 and begins pre-positioning manpower, assets and supplies outside the affected counties. During the late afternoon, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services believe an outbreak of plague has occurred. Federal assistance is requested. Local, state and Federal officials in both New Jersey and New York immediately mobilize for action.

Surrounding states begin experiencing isolated outbreaks of illness manifesting generalized symptoms. Public Service Announcements instruct the public about the importance of personal protective measures like frequent hand-washing, staying home from work if sick and seeking prompt medical attention.
By late Day 3, casualties in the “ground-zero” counties rise dramatically. Absenteeism among workforce, student and college populations in the affected zones tops 40% and will climb even higher in the coming days.

Sales and commercial transactions drop across the Northeast. Some businesses, large and small, in the impacted areas begin to scale back or temporarily suspend operations. The sudden loss of business and revenue will cause some companies to relocate. Others will never re-open.

Mass transit passengers and traffic on the major highways are way down. Air carriers cancel fights into and out of Newark Liberty International Airport. Freighters destined for the Port of New York and New Jersey divert to the south. Trading on the Stock Exchange reflects the anxiety felt by corporate shareholders and the public.

Other middle and northern New Jersey counties experience their own surge of sick and dying. New cases appear across the Northeast, Midwest, Canada, Puerto Rico, and in Europe. The use of “Pandemic” is bandied about in the press.

Presumptive diagnoses in central and northern New Jersey identify the presence of Y. pestis. New Jersey formally requests the immediate deployment of the Strategic National Stockpile. This information is also communicated to the World Health Organization.

Epidemiological investigators using statistical analysis based on victim interviews trace the source or origin back to several of the aforementioned transportation hubs. Health officials anxiously await laboratory confirmation from the Centers for Disease Control. The waiting quickly comes to an end and worst fears are realized.

During the early hours of Day 4, Hudson and Union Counties apply to the state for a quarantine order. By 7:00 a.m., New Jersey’s Governor declares a State of Emergency and implements the Emergency Health Powers Act. A complete activation of the New Jersey National Guard is ordered to augment law enforcement whose ranks are thinning daily due to illness. Senior Public and Private Sector executives are not spared and become victims themselves. A Presidential Declaration is issued at 10:00 a.m. for New Jersey and New York.

Authorities are unable to say with assurance whether the unfolding bio-terror event paralyzing the Northeast and beyond is the primary attack or cover for something larger. The Homeland Security Advisory System Level is raised to RED – Severe Risk of Terrorist Attack. Maritime Security (MARSEC) levels at East Coast ports are increased. The United States Northern Command places US based military forces on alert. Heightened security measures are implemented along the nation’s borders, in the sky, around commercial ports, and at critical infrastructure sites.

Despite the posture assumed by the U.S. homeland, the World Health Organization (WHO) issues a travel advisory for New Jersey and New York City and recommends postponing all but the most essential travel. Reaction by Federal and state authorities to the WHO promulgation is one of condemnation. They counter with a full accounting of the emergency health measures being implemented to contain and mitigate the event. Print and TV editorials call for calm and resolve but also question the effectiveness of monies previously spent to detect and prevent a biological agent or pandemic outbreak within the United States.

As Day 4 draws to a close, local, state and national resources are rapidly mobilized and a massive response effort launched. For many of the afflicted, the infusion of aid will not alter their fate.
The sick and dead number more than 8,000 in a single day. In the grim business of counting casualties, deceased exceed sick by approximately 1600. The state’s hospitals and county morgues cannot accommodate the cumulating death toll standing now at over 5,700. Urgent appeals are made to the Private Sector for refrigerator trucks and warehouse space. Tragically, the event has yet to run its course.

A cascading number of sick seek medical attention throughout the night and into the morning of Day 5. However, many who seek medical attention exhibit psychosomatic symptoms rooted in hysteria.

By mid-day, Points of Distribution (POD) open in the central and northern regions of the state. Local health department implement distribution plans in suburban areas. Hospitals in the south undertake hurried preparations to receive patient overflows from the hardest hit communities to the north. Emergency bed capacity is expanded and medical staffs are recalled from home. An existing shortage of doctors and nurses at some facilities exacerbates the mushrooming health crisis. Officials ask the Private Sector for volunteers (especially licensed medical professionals), facilities and supplies in an attempt to alleviate suffering and stem the tide of an event of seemingly uncontrollable proportions.

Despite the arrival of SNS medications, severe disruptions occur across the state. A riot erupts at one urban POD over delays in dispensing medications. Outside quarantined areas, schools and colleges cancel classes and shutter campuses. Day care centers close without projected reopening dates. Conventions and business meetings are postponed. Service industries cannot honor contracts or commitments. Even visitors and group excursions to Atlantic City’s casinos are appreciably down. Workforce absenteeism is adversely affecting New Jersey’s economy and quality of life.

Every county is soon engaged in a race to protect their residents. Fatalities climb. Official information must be carefully managed to avoid further rumors and panic and ensure cooperation from a worried and frustrated public. The business community demands better and timelier intelligence from law enforcement and health officials. Continuity of operation decisions depend on real-time, actionable information from government authorities.
Staffing shortages arise at hospitals, public institutions, residential care facilities, emergency response agencies, and in the workplace. Large numbers of employees are either absent from work or no-shows. Providers of essential services find product delivery increasingly difficult and shortages of critical commodities such as food and gasoline begin to appear. On-hand inventories cannot keep up with demand.

The affected area radiates outward with new cases reported in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, and Union counties. Thousands from the state’s most populous cities and suburbs evacuate south and west to escape the spreading pneumonic plague. The Governor’s Office takes immediate action to prevent a wholesale introduction of plague into the state’s southern and western counties and to ensure that prophylaxis of the public goes as planned.

The Governor directs the closing of bridges, roads and tunnels leading out of New Jersey and orders evacuating residents to return home. Police, county sheriffs and the National Guard enforce the Governor’s decree with some degree of success. The FAA complies with New Jersey’s request to temporarily close the state’s airports to civil and commercial aviation.

Government’s decision to suspend unauthorized travel within and out of New Jersey causes almost immediate economic repercussions and reverberations across the country. A revocation of the most onerous travel restrictions takes place as the state’s morbidity rate begins to drop.

The public health crisis nears its apex on Day 6. Patients with pneumonic plague symptoms continue to present at hospitals in 12 of New Jersey’s 21 counties. Meanwhile FEMA and a host of other Federal and volunteer agencies work around the clock to provide a myriad of medical and social services.

Bringing business back into the hardest hit areas and opening schools and colleges become pressing priorities. Government’s ultimate goal is restore a sense of normality and confidence in public officials and in the communities hardest hit by the epidemic.

Hospitals experience severe shortages of specialized medical equipment such as ventilators. Supply networks used to procure standard medical items undergo severe strain. Mental health counselors cannot keep up with the demand for interventions and services. Medical related expenditures and insurance claims skyrocket. Yet, there is good news. While the number of sick continues on an upward vector, fatalities decline significantly. New Jersey has turned the corner but is not out of the woods just yet.

On Day 7, hospitals in 18 New Jersey counties are still treating pneumonic plague cases. The rate of fatalities falls due to the availability of antibiotics. Yet, thousands more will show up at medical facilities well into the recovery period following several subsequent waves of pneumonic plague outbreaks.

The gruesome toll attributed to the pneumonic plague release is more than 9,500 fatalities and 29,000 ill for the week depicted in graph below. The death toll will continue to mount, albeit much more slowly, in the coming months.
Infectious diseases and viruses are non-discriminatory. Those lacking adequate protection are likely victims regardless of their station in life. The sheer magnitude of the pneumonic plague outbreak stresses local, county and state capacities and services. People and systems are pushed to the breaking point in a relatively short period of time.

If the scenario depicted became reality, decision makers at all levels would face the daunting task of managing multiple crises along with cascading problem sets precipitated by an escalating operations tempo. The potential burdens placed on emergency response agencies and government officials as illustrated underscores the importance of forging strong Public-Private partnerships in the Preparation Phase.

**EXERCISE FINDINGS**

1. **The Preparation Phase personifies the lull before the storm.** The Preparation Phase offers opportunities for both the Public and Private Sectors to address urgent matters and controversial decisions affecting continuity of operations and workforce security. A failure to sufficiently plan for either may ultimately degrade a company’s ability to survive a calamitous event. Measures to consider include:
   
   a. Educating senior leaders about potential issues and the need for establishing priorities  
   b. Developing a robust and redundant communications system  
   c. Improving critical infrastructure readiness and resiliency  
   d. Identifying essential employees and, if necessary, prioritize workers for initial receipt of medications and/or vaccinations should supply shortfalls exist  
   e. Forming relationships with county agencies and owners of critical infrastructure  
   f. Establishing a safe work environment during and following a catastrophic event

2. **Employee welfare is a central component of business continuity.** Businesses are obligated to protect their workers. During a catastrophic event like a large bio-terror release, access to available resources will affect private sector operations. Also, under certain conditions, guaranteeing survival or even inviolate sanctuary is improbable. The Private Sector may need to consider expanding the definition of essential worker otherwise a lack of personnel could degrade operations in the midst of a crisis. Furthermore, supply lines and stockpile of medications may atrophy or “dry up” completely.

   Many organizations have continuity of operations plans in place but some questioned whether or not they will work during a crisis. However, several wondered if enough medication would exist to meet private sector requirements. Rationing looms as a stark reality. A particularly vexing question focused on the speed of Strategic National Stockpile deliveries.

   Would SNS distribution during an event come too late for business and industry? Sustaining or restoring business operations cannot happen without a strategy and functioning workforce. The time to think through such difficult matters is the Preparation phase - and with good reason. Resuming business and commerce with minimal disruption is crucial to returning normal following a major catastrophe. Thus, private sector leaders must steel themselves against a range of possibilities.

3. **Attaining the proper level of preparedness demands resolute leadership.** Strong, enlightened and decisive leadership throughout the Private Sector is necessary to examine plausible scenarios and then dedicate resources to fill identified gaps in preparation and response. Planning lacks credibility and relevancy if an organization’s senior leadership does not provide clear direction and support. Leaders, both public and private, should think about the potential challenges they may confront and start preparing now.
Senior leaders of private sector entities must determine in advance what degree of self-sufficiency they wish their organizations to attain. A key planning assumption private sector companies and organizations must wrestle with is the prospect of operating autonomously until assistance arrives. Based on the Katrina Experience, relief could take days and even weeks to reach the impacted areas. This particular fact remained in the forefront of participant thinking.

4. **Unimpeded two-way information exchanges greatly aid private sector decision making and continuity of operations.** The Private Sector will seek actionable and timely information from the Public Sector especially at the onset of a crisis. Private sector priorities are aimed at eliminating supply chain disruptions, maintaining production levels, efficient activations of contingency plans, and effective measures to protect workforces and their families. Like government, companies must make pivotal decisions during the earliest moments of an event. Ultimately, the stakes are high.

Staying in business during a pandemic will enable the nation to recover economically and psychologically following a pandemic outbreak. A failure by government to provide cross-sector intelligence and information sharing could trigger serious financial repercussions for business and shock the national psyche.

The issue of cultural barriers even among government agencies was a pervasive theme throughout the exercise. Some participants expressed frustration about barriers to effective information sharing citing problems with organizational cultures and clearance requirements. According to industry representatives, the lack of transparency during a bio-event could affect the distribution of medications or other supplies. Mutual trust was also a limiting factor.

Companies do not always have an abiding confidence in the Department of Health and Senior Services to safeguard sensitive information and fear the potential fallout from a breach of confidentiality. Conversely, government singled out proprietary considerations as a problem on the private sector side. Nor are all industries forthcoming. Requested information is occasionally withheld from government.

On a positive note, information on critical infrastructure is shared with the Private Sector by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP). Based upon established procedures, OHSP maintains a list of contact persons and, when threat levels rise, initiates a communications process for passing intelligence back and forth. In the end, the Private Sector must assess the value of the information received and feedback its utility to OHSP.

Finally, exercise participants opined several ways to improve information sharing. These included (1) determining who you tell and when; (2) sharing private sector plans with public agencies; (3) cultivating multiple sources and streams of information; and (4) engaging the Public Sector in discussions about issues. One suggestion encouraged private sector organizations to investigate fully all informational sources available to them.

5. **When planning for a bio-event, clearly “a threat to one is a threat to all.”** Exercise participants emphasized the existing interdependencies between business/industry and government. Neither has the capacity, resources or personnel to mitigate the conditions produced by catastrophic events without aid and assistance from the other. Of particular concern are the heavy demands placed on available but limited Public Sector resources. Another presumption painted a picture where the sheer magnitude of a major bio-terror event would overwhelm law enforcement. Scenarios like these illustrate why communication and cooperation between the Public and Private Sectors is a fact of Post-9/11 life.
In addressing bio-terror threats, Private sector representatives voiced a number of compelling realities: (1) Despite an obligation to safeguard its workforces, companies cannot protect all employees; (2) Not everyone will live through the aftermath of a major bio-terror attack; (3) Waiting until an actual, full-scale SNS distribution commences to prophylaxis essential workers is simply “too late” for the business community; (4) Survivability of business will depend on supply chain reliability and sustainability; and, (5) The Private Sector does not have its own separate stockpile of medications/serums. To address these and other formidable problem areas, the Private and Private Sectors must engage in collaborate projects with unity of effort as the goal.

Public-Private Sector integration and interoperability is achievable and best accomplished in the Preparation Phase. Several activities lend themselves to attaining the desired synergy necessary to manage large-scale catastrophes: joint planning, training and exercising, sharing of contingency plans, company membership on Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) and private sector representation in the state Emergency Operations Center.

6. Bio-terrorism would create problem sets uniquely different and totally distinct from today's emphasis on physical infrastructure protection. Participants postulated from the tabletop scenario itself about a radically altered environment they termed the “New Normal.” Americans would have to cope not only with shattered lives resulting from substantial personal and community loss but economic turmoil coupled with a diminished sense of personal well-being. On-going disruptions of societal rhythms would become reluctantly accepted as routine. Furthermore, the conditions present in the “New Normal” may give government and business leaders few good options from which to choose.

Government leaders will find themselves wrestling with tough choices and ethical dilemmas. For example, does the governor order road closures at the risk of further damaging the state’s economy and triggering shortages of high-demand staple items? Who or what groups receive first priority under an emergency medication distribution scheme? If such decisions are implemented, will the measures ignite social unrest? Or, how do you keep the state open for business while the number of sick and dying continues to climb?

Supply chain interruptions and failures will stress local and regional economies and lead to lost productivity. Suddenly, everyday technologies and services may become unavailable; another possibility in the New Normal. Remaining operationally viable may very well push business managers and government leaders to the limits of their capabilities and ingenuity. What starts out as annoying ripples immediately following the release of a biological agent could quickly morph into cascading, debilitating waves.

Private Sector executives will confront a host of constraints in keeping their operations running. Like government, businesses will address unique and anxiety-ridden circumstances while relying on reduced workforces. Knowing in advance when absentee rates approach critical mass is an important trigger for initiating critical decision making. Escalating absenteeism could put tremendous pressure on executives to close hard-hit facilities, relocate altogether or even abrogate agreements with suppliers who can no longer fulfill contractual agreements. In making critical and time-sensitive decisions, they will look toward government for precise, real-time intelligence. According to the exercise participants, the preparatory phase is the time to formulate information-sharing protocols - not when chaos rules the day.

7. Education and training programs conducted during Preparation ultimately contributes to robust Private Sector response capabilities. Educating employees about potential threats, the consequences each carries and how to protect themselves and their families can strengthen a
company’s overall response capability. Employee understanding of the dangers and hazards one can expect to confront is foundational to an effective response program. So, who bares responsibility for training the Private Sector?

Exercise participants viewed training as a Public Sector responsibility but within the context of a collaborative Public-Private partnership. Discussion shifted to the role the new Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP). One priority attributed to OHSP is the education of Private Sector employees about threats from modern day terrorists and corresponding protective measures. One proposal reportedly under consideration by state officials is the deployment of Public Sector education teams who will instruct diverse audiences including the Private Sector. No one could offer additional details.

8. **Response cannot proceed until the impact of workforce absenteeism is attenuated.** Getting employees back to work as soon and safely as possible is the number one Private Sector priority during Response. An estimated absentee rate of 30% or higher will seriously impact productivity and the “supply chain.” For instance, the ability to re-supply those hospitals that activate emergency health plans following a bio-event could prove onerous based on the observations of one health care professional. In the case of the utilities industry, gas companies will still have gas leaks and essential line repairs during an emergency. To remain viable, companies must prioritize their activities and determine manpower requirements well in advance of an event.

Neither of the aforementioned sectors can fulfill mandated mission without the availability of highly-specialized employees. Changed and unforeseen circumstances will force companies to figure out how they will function effectively with a diminished number of workers. To accomplish these tasks, flexibility and resiliency across departments including revised Human Resource policies is imperative for adapting to evolving conditions and preventing the crisis from escalating out of control. Conversely, if an employee is sick, directing them to remain at home may help limit a pathogen’s spread. Employers do have an obligation to make workplace environs as safe and secure as possible.

9. **The effectiveness of Private Sector operations during Response is determined, in part, by the quality and frequency of information provided by Public Sector agencies.** Participants believed the Private Sector should have a role in determining what information/intelligence it receives. Prior business continuity planning can identify vital operations, critical assets and essential personnel necessary to mitigate disruptions and restore core functions. Yet, the way a company executes its response depends on the timeliness and quality of information received from government agencies. Actionable information will enable the Private Sector to assess the limits of allowable risk and determine when to scale back operations in the interest of employee welfare. Knowing how to best protect workers and their families positions the Private Sector to assist those communities in distress much sooner.

10. **A major bio-terror event will likely precipitate a transformed operating environment requiring business to adopt new functions and responsibilities.** A bio-terror event of significant proportions will undoubtedly alter marketplace dynamics. Its ripple effects will radiate outward from the targeted areas and extend across the nation. Resuming a pre-event operational tempo will prove formidable due to absenteeism, reduced workforces, supply chain disruptions and shortages, and a wrenching fear of what might come next. Consequently, the fundamentals of commercial enterprise and civic obligation will undergo profound changes.

Businesses and other organizations will undertake continuity actions according to evolving conditions. Exercise participants speculated about what this transformed operating environment may
look like. They surfaced distinct themes continuity planners should consider when developing response and recovery protocols. These themes are as follows:

a. Government will find it increasingly difficult to organize effective response and recovery efforts without Private Sector assistance
b. Escalating demands arising from a major bio-terror event will overwhelm law enforcement and public health
c. Mandatory prioritization of fuel and other critical materials will ensure continuity of essential public and private sector functions
d. Under states of emergency, critical assets and materials identified in contingency plans may not be available
e. Government may commandeer certain stockpiled materials and supplies held in reserve
f. Workers with critical skills must still use the state’s roads despite declared states of emergency
g. The financial implications arising from a major bio-terror event will cause many businesses to fail or experience serious losses in revenue and capital
h. Concern for family members will challenge worker loyalty to their employers and jobs/professions

11. **The Public Sector will require private sector resources and support to engineer a successful recovery effort.** Difficult and unresolved problems will become increasingly complex with the passage of time. To restore a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible, overwhelmed government officials will seek Private Sector help. The Public Sector will turn to the Public Sector for assets, assessments on what it will take to jump start local and regional economies and cooperation in restoring government services.

Many of the attendees expected the Private Sector to take the lead during Recovery. Again, government cannot shoulder Herculean loads all by itself. For effective Private Sector engagement, participants identified the types of assistance business may need from government officials: money, temporary tax relief and relaxed regulations. A continuous two-way flow of timely information between the two sectors can prevent communications breakdowns and mistrust. The potential consequence of failing to cooperate is huge – serious economic repercussions, government imposed restrictions and dashed hopes for a speedy recovery.

12. **Today’s business continuity planners will find their planning assumptions assiduously tested during the Recovery Period especially when biological pathogens are involved.** Continuity planners must develop strategies for solving tomorrow’s problems by applying today’s knowledge and insights. This same task was given to the exercise participants using the World Trade Center Recovery and Hurricane Katrina as backdrops. In pondering the challenge, they identified several pertinent issues applicable to continuity planning for catastrophic events.

a. Recovery actually begins in the pre-event stage with shared information, training and resources
b. Information is a key factor during Recovery
c. Unanswered questions remain about guaranteeing and/or expanding the benefits of employees who assist with relief and recovery efforts
d. The demand for mental health services will grow substantially during Recovery
e. Private Sector knowledge about the protections offered under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is very important
f. How to bring business back to the areas impacted by a bio-terror event may become the Private Sector’s greatest test
g. To function effectively during Response and Recovery, the Private Sector must know how the Incident Command System (ICS) works

h. An efficient and user-friendly system for quickly identifying and mobilizing Private Sector assets and resources during/following catastrophic events is needed to replace or supplement the National Emergency Response Registry (NERR) employed during Katrina

CONCLUSION

The scenario referenced during the tabletop exercise described unimaginable loss and suffering. While fictional in context, the underlying themes presented are quite plausible. Individuals directly affected by a biological event would find their lives fundamentally transformed. Others will feel the event’s cascading effects. In many instances, bio-terror survivors will feel helpless as if swept downstream by a raging current. This metaphor captures a main conclusion drawn from the exercise – biological events target people and not infrastructure. Regrettably, companies cannot protect everyone even after implementing comprehensive prevention programs. Conversely, preparation and prevention measures can vastly improve the prospects of survival by reducing risks and vulnerabilities.

Tabletop participants placed considerable emphasis on the need for preparation. Proper preparation demands commitment at all organizational levels and, in many cases, increased expenditures. Central to the preparation process is prior planning. Yet, organizational plans can exist in many forms and differ in varying degrees of scope and scale. Consistency and standardization is vitally important. Therefore, a comprehensive exercise program is a proven method for assessing and validating plans and operating procedures before our sense of normalcy is unexpectedly shattered. History records the consequences of those who failed to adequately plan and exercise.

For the most part, the Private Sector understands the strategic and operational implications of being ill-prepared. The resulting toll in lost revenue, souls and social stability is incalculable although the scenario did attempt to simplistically quantify some of the probable outcomes based on statistical models. When the dreaded day comes, both government and business leaders will engage in some of the most onerous and gut-wrenching decision making possible. Depending on the industry, legions of essential workers will risk personal safety while performing their jobs during response and recovery. As recent history has shown, our communities will not enjoy some semblance of normality or live securely without courage, perseverance and sacrifice.

A vexing problem inherent in America’s approach to securing the homeland surfaced repeatedly during the exercise discussion. The Private Sector controls/manages 80-85% of the critical infrastructure in New Jersey and across the nation. Collectively, the Private Sector is seeking greater involvement in the emergency management milieu. A company’s likelihood of staying in business during a major event depends on the degree of protection and workplace safeguards afforded employees and their families. In addition, a serious commitment to education and self-sufficiency inarguably strengthens the Private Sector’s capacity to respond and recover from manmade, natural or technological disasters. Ironically, according to tabletop participants, the Public Sector is trying to figure out how to accommodate the Private Sector’s wishes. Not surprisingly, organizational culture frequently acts as a barrier to the type of communication and cooperation needed.

Participants repeatedly hit upon the value-added benefits of information sharing. In their view, open and candid collaboration can yield tangible outcomes. Specifically, exchanging information and knowledge identifies gaps in preparation, lowers institutional barriers and spawns innovative solutions to thorny problems. An inability or reluctance to share intelligence serves to complicate and frustrate the efforts of planners, practitioners and policy makers alike.
Too often in the pre-event stage there are more questions than answers. Emergency responders, business continuity managers and decision makers won’t know what they will encounter until “the monster” appears at their door. Once an event commences, ambiguity and chaos will prevail until reigned in by agencies, departments and Private Sector entities working in concert with one another.

John Donne, the 17th Century English poet, wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main…” In today’s insidious threat environment, no agency, department or organization can operate long in self-imposed isolation from rapidly unfolding events. Threats whether manmade, natural or technological have the potential to hit and hit hard with devastating effect where we live, work and play.

Limiting the effects of catastrophic events requires unity of effort: joint planning, information sharing and exercising. Forming synergistic relationship is a building-block process for securing the homeland and protecting our communities against all hazards. Promoting and expanding Public-Private Sectors dialogue and collaboration in the pursuit of efficient and effective partnerships was an overarching goal of the Private Sector Tabletop Exercise facilitated by the New Jersey Business Force. Judging from the exercise findings delineated in this report, participant discussion and interaction was substantive and productive. The next step in the evolving partnership process is to transform resulting levels of awareness and intent into concrete action.
ANNEX A

TABLETOP MODULE QUESTIONS

MODULE 1

MITIGATION AND PREPAREDNESS

1. The U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary in discussing the potential for a major flu outbreak, said, “. . . businesses need to have a plan, faith organizations need to have a plan . . .” How prepared is the Private Sector in general and your company specifically for the type of bio-terrorism event described in the scenario?

2. With approximately 85% of the nation’s critical infrastructure residing in the Private Sector, how can businesses address the current risks to facilities and day-to-day operations?

3. Does the Private Sector have an inherent obligation to safeguard employees and the communities surrounding its facilities?

4. Is there an early warning network to which the Private Sector can turn if terrorist attack with biological weapons? How do employees get timely and accurate information?

5. What can the Private Sector do to ensure the safety of essential workers with specialty skills particularly when their services are needed in the areas of impact or hot zones?

6. How can a common operating picture be created among diverse Private Sector companies and organizations? How can the Private Sector be integrated into Public Sector plans?

7. Does current Private Sector preparedness planning fully address the formidable challenges depicted in the pneumonic plague scenario? What areas can be enhanced or improved?

8. What work policies or practices can the Private Sector implement during public health emergencies to minimize disruptions and sustain day-to-day operations?

9. How can the Private Sector be integrated into the state response structure for major emergencies or terrorist attacks? Can the Private Sector turn to an early warning network?

10. How can today’s threats better prepare the Private Sector for tomorrow’s eventualities?

MODULE 3

RESPONSE

1. What would be your organization’s priorities during a major bio-event like the one portrayed in the scenario?

2. Workplace absenteeism will likely reflect the epidemiological progression rate encountered during a bio-event.

   a. Does your company monitor daily absenteeism?
b. Are protocols in place for reporting abnormal absenteeism?

c. What actions would your company/organization take if significant numbers of employees (> 20% for two to four weeks) stayed home or suffered debilitating illness?

3. Based on the scenario presented, what would your company need to know from government and public health officials and when would you need to know it?

4. Can the Private Sector wait for government to act before making expedient decisions on its own after the full effects of a biological event are felt?

5. How would the emergency closure of airports, roads, bridges, and mass transit affect your organization’s operation?

6. What impact would county and state ordered isolation/quarantine measures have on your company or organization?

7. Based upon items four, five, and six above, where would your company’s senior management turn for advice and recommendations or to report critical incidents and adverse impacts stemming from decisions implemented by Public Sector officials?

8. How would your company respond if employees display pneumonic plague symptoms at work?

9. How can the Private Sector protect vital services such as utilities and food distribution from serious disruptions caused by catastrophic bio-terrorism or governmental measures?

10. How quickly could your organization respond in the midst of a bio-event to requests from state and local government for assets, services and trained personnel with specialized skills? Are there risks involved in doing so?

11. Under what conditions would the Private Sector commit facilities and manpower for the distribution of medications and vaccines to the general public?

12. How do you prevent an event from becoming catastrophic?

**MODULE 4**

**RECOVERY AND RESTORATION**

1. What are the Private Sector’s greatest challenges and priorities during recovery and restoration?

2. What roles can the Private Sector expect to play during short and long-term recovery and restoration?

3. What are the Private Sector’s expectations for government during recovery and restoration?

4. What are the potential impacts if Private Sector companies cannot meet contractual obligations due to significant absenteeism or repercussions caused by government imposed measures and restrictions?

5. How can the Private Sector reduce liability for events and consequences lying outside their normal span of control?
6. What Private Sector resources will government likely seek during recovery and restoration? What would the Private Sector need from the State of New Jersey?

7. If employees voluntarily assist with relief efforts during major disasters and emergencies, will such actions affect employer sponsored benefits and coverage?

8. How can Private Sector companies and organizations address the immediate need of employees for counseling and other mental health services following an event like the one described in the scenario?

9. How will the Private Sector bring workers and businesses back to the areas hardest hit by the plague, i.e. re-establish economic confidence and stability?

10. Who can best represent the interests of a diverse group like the Private Sector?

**MODULE 5**

**FACILITATOR SUMMARY**

1. Effective Public-Private partnerships depend on:
   a. Information sharing
   b. Advanced planning and Private Sector role definition
   c. Resource networks - resource sharing
   d. Identifying and understanding each other’s thresholds
   e. Maintaining an awareness of each other’s constituencies
   f. Joint exercising and training
   g. Reducing and eliminating organizational cultural barriers

2. What does the Private Sector need to know and do to build viable partnerships?

3. What does the Public Sector need to know and do to create inclusive partnerships?

4. How can some of the ideas and discussion points from today’s Private Sector Tabletop Exercise be integrated into your business operation?

5. Are there other areas or topics not addressed today that should be examined at future venues?