

Biological Incident Annex

Introduction

[\[Link to the Biological Incident Annex in the NRP\]](#)

Response to a biological incident in the coastal zone can range from the illegal disposal of medical waste to the intentional release of a disease-causing organism. Initial response actions to a biological incident will depend on the type of incident and the cause or suspected cause of the incident (i.e. terrorist act).

The Coast Guard Incident Commander's response to biological incidents most likely will involve the use of both the Captain of the Port and Federal On-scene Coordinator (FOOSC) authorities. The FOOSC role is limited to disease causing agents that exist outside a host for a period of time and which can be physically removed from the environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this Annex is to provide initial response guidance upon notification of a suspected or actual report of a biological incident in the coastal zone.

If the biological incident is suspected or confirmed to be the result of a terrorist act, response to the incident should be initiated using this Annex, the Terrorism Incident Annex, and the Area Maritime Security Plan which can be found on [HOMEPORT](#).

Using this Annex

The guidance in this Annex includes initial actions to be taken when responding to:

- Illegally dumped medical waste
- Quarantine (suspected or confirmed infectious disease on a vessel)
- Suspect or confirmed release of a biological agent involving:
 - Tainted, contaminated or otherwise suspect cargoes
 - Passengers and crew of a vessel
 - Buildings in the coastal zone

Illegally dumped medical waste

- Determine if competent authorities are taking appropriate action to remove the hazard (State and/or local health agencies are normally the lead agencies)
 - If yes,
 - Provide support as capabilities, authorities and safety of Coast Guard personnel allows
 - If no,
 - Contact local law enforcement and secure the area

- Ensure that local health officials are aware of the incident
- Determine if the medical waste presents an imminent and substantial danger to public health
- Initiate cleanup operations under CERCLA
- Hire a contractor authorized to handle medical waste to remove the hazard. Local cleanup contractors that can respond to a biological incident [Future Link to Contractor List]

Quarantine (suspected or confirmed infectious disease on a vessel)

The intent of quarantine is to isolate the vessel involved, prevent those infected from going ashore without proper precautions, and to limit exposure to shore side personnel.

Upon notification that a vessel may have a possible or actual communicable disease onboard or is flying the quarantine flag, the following actions should be taken:

- Immediately establish communications with the vessel to determine
 - Why the vessel is flying the quarantine flag
 - What disease is onboard
- Determine if the vessel has adequate crew to safely navigate the vessel
- Do not permit any Coast Guard personnel to board the vessel without approved safety precautions
- Immediately notify federal, state and local health departments
 - [U.S. Public Health Department](#)
 - [Puerto Rico Department of Health](#)
 - Centro Medico Building Complex
Phone (787) 777-3535
 - Building A Mental Center
Phone (787) 274-7676
Phone (787) 474-2028 (24 Hours)
Phone 1-800-981-5721 (Hotline)
Fax (787) 765-7840
 - USVI Department of Health
48 Sugar Estate
Charlotte Amalie, USVI 00802
Phone (340) 774-0117 or 773-6551
Fax (340) 777-4001 or 773-1376
- Gather medical information on affected crewmembers and passengers
- Obtain Local Agent Information and crew list
- Establish vessel security to control access (on and off the vessel)
- Maintain log of personnel that come on and off the vessel
- Ensure that Pilot's Association is notified (If possible prior to Boarding)
- Issue COTP order to
 - Implement a security and safety plan

- Prohibit cargo operations
 - Prohibit discharge of 'grey' water, garbage and other consumable to shore
- Notify unit's Public Health Doctor to advise the Command and provide liaison with local health officials
- Direct vessel agent to secure the appropriate medical assistance for crew
- As directed by public health, Incident Commander implement port quarantine plan
- Notify Center for Disease Control, request assistance from Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
- Notify Customs and Border Protection

Suspected or confirmed release of a biological agent

The actions that the Coast Guard Incident Commander takes in response to a suspected or confirmed release of a biological agent will be driven by many factors:

- Is the incident on a vessel? If yes,
 - Have the crew and/or passengers been impacted?; or,
 - Is it the vessel's cargo?
- Is the incident at a facility or building in the coastal zone?
- Is the intelligence credible?

For any suspected or confirmed biological incidents involving vessels

- Consult with appropriate agencies to determine details for issuing a Captain of the Port Order directing the vessel to remain offshore or go to a safe anchorage [Link to Port of Safe Refuge/Security Event on a Vessel Document]
- Work with the appropriate Intelligence Agencies to determine if threat is credible or non-credible
 - If credible, support the Department of Health and Human Services which is the Coordinating Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigations
- Initiate Critical Incident Communications procedures
- Determine if Safe to Respond
 - Work with the Unified Command to determine the control zones (hot, warm, cold)
 - Ensure Unified Command communicates location of zones to response personnel
 - Document Safe to Respond determination
- Support designated public health officials to minimize the health risk of passengers and crew
 - Isolation of contaminated areas
 - Gross decontamination for exposed personnel (showers)
 - Minimize spread by securing contaminated articles (bag suspected clothing)
- Ensure all crew, pilot and passengers are accounted for and maintain positive

- control
- ❑ Determine if a safety zone will be required (waterside and landside)
- ❑ Determine any actions required for the safety of the crew and any passengers
- ❑ Contact Seventh District for determination if a Statement of No Objection (SNO) is required for law enforcement boarding
- ❑ If necessary, request a Crisis Exemption from the Environmental Protection Agency for the use of any chemical countermeasures that use products regulated by the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) of 1996
- ❑ Crisis communications
 - Medical professionals should communicate with the public
 - Public health are the primary spokespersons for biological incidents
- ❑ Determine need to obtain CERCLA funding

If suspected source for the biological agent is cargo

The Unified Command should consider the following priorities, objectives and determinations when responding to a suspected biological agent that involves a vessel's cargo.

Unified Command Priorities

- ❑ Safety of boarding teams
- ❑ Public safety
- ❑ Selecting a location to offload suspected cargo/passengers
- ❑ Disposal of the cargo

Unified Command Objectives

- ❑ Conduct security boarding
 - Boarding team to examine ship's medical log to determine if any entries were made regarding crew's possible exposure to a biological agent
- ❑ Check for secondary devices (explosives)
- ❑ Conduct non-intrusive assessment of suspect cargo testing for:
 - Flammable
 - Radiological
 - Chemical
 - Biological
 - Explosives
- ❑ Ensure the preservation of evidence for potential prosecution

Unified Command Determinations

- ❑ Determine the location where suspected cargo should be offloaded
 - At anchorage

- Pier side
- Determine need to establish a Science Team
- Determine where to dispose of the cargo
 - At sea
 - On land – May require State permit for disposal, a problem may occur when crossing state boundaries

Unified Command Organization

The cooperation of many organizations will be required to successfully respond to and mitigate the threat posed by a biological incident. The information depicted in Figure 1 represents agencies that may support a biological response operation and where they may potentially operate in a Unified Command organization. This information should be used in conjunction with the Unified Command organization structure outlined in the Terrorism Incident Annex.

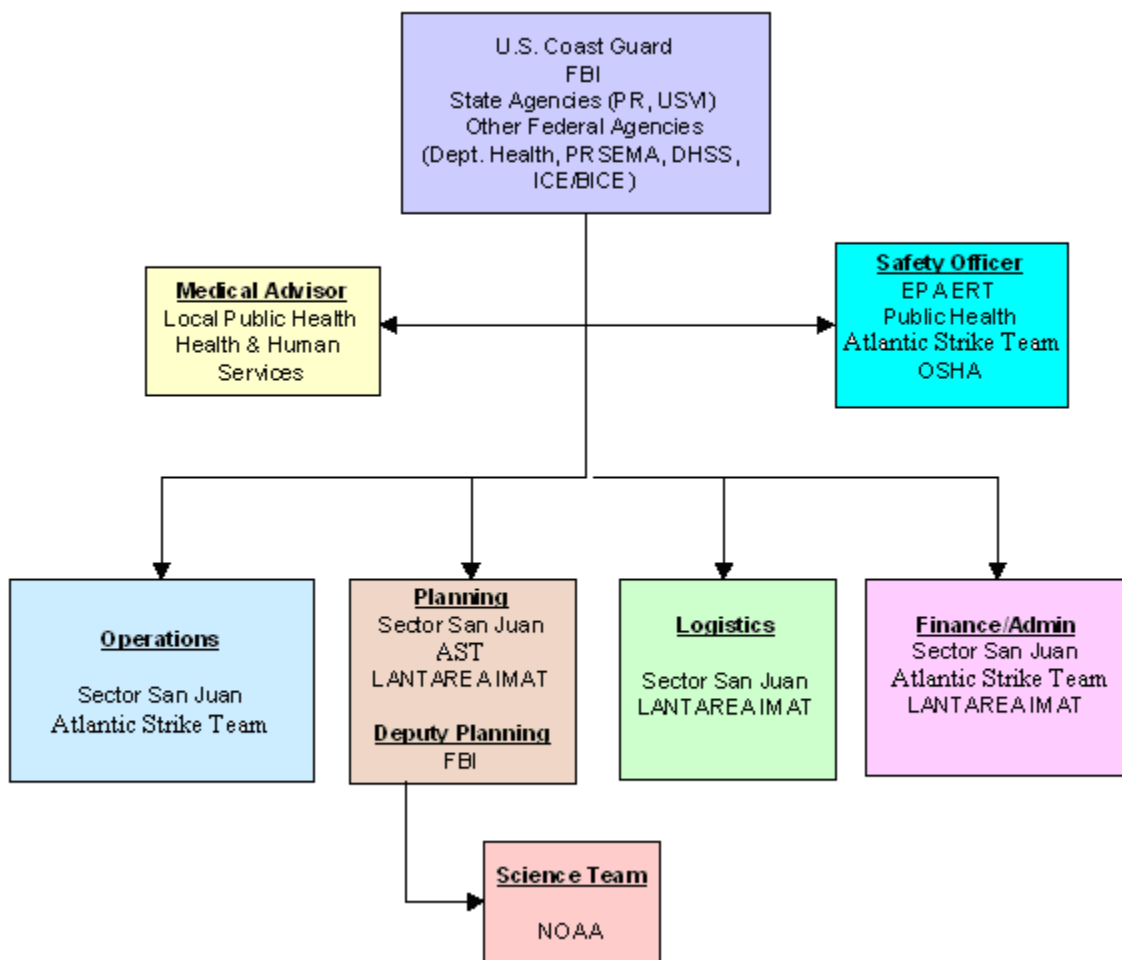


Figure 1

Figure 1 depicts the potential agencies that may respond to a biological incident in the coastal zone. The information in this Figure should be used in conjunction with the ICS organization structure in the Terrorism Incident Annex.

Science Team: The Science Team is led by NOAA's Scientific Support Coordinator and is responsible for:

- ❑ Determining appropriate entry procedures for inspecting the interiors of suspected containers if container cargo
- ❑ Developing a sampling plan
- ❑ Developing disposal protocols for unknown biological hazards
- ❑ Developing plan to transport and dispose of contamination

The Science Team may have representation from a wide variety of agencies and entities including but not limited to:

- ❑ Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- ❑ U.S. Department of Agriculture
- ❑ USCG Atlantic Strike Team
- ❑ Environmental Protection Agency Region II
- ❑ Request for EPA assistance made through their Regional Response Center 24-hour number
- ❑ Food and Drug Administration
- ❑ State Health Agencies
- ❑ Puerto Rico Department of Health Services
- ❑ Puerto Rico State Emergency Management Agency
- ❑ USVI Department of Health
- ❑ Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS)
- ❑ Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board

A Building Structure in the Coastal Zone

Local and state health agencies have primary jurisdiction in responding to biological incidents. The Coast Guard Incident Commander will ensure that:

- ❑ Competent authorities are responding
- ❑ Notifications are made to the appropriate authorities:
 - Environmental Protection Agency Region II
 - Federal Bureau of Investigation San Juan Field Office
- ❑ The incident site is secured
 - A site assessment is conducted
 - Sampling and analysis plan
- ❑ Once situation is stable the CGIC will begin transferring the role of Federal On-scene Coordinator to the appropriate EPA region

Special Teams

The following special teams are equipped to respond to biological incidents, and should be considered as potential response resources:

- ❑ EPA Emergency Response Team (ERT)
- ❑ USCG Atlantic Strike Team (AST)
- ❑ OSHA
- ❑ NOAA
- ❑ Special Teams are accessed through PR SEMA
 - Local Hazmat Teams
 - National Guard WMD Civil Support Team
- ❑ Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board Specialized Response Team and Assets
- ❑ Special Teams are accessed through Puerto Rico State Emergency Management Agency

Additional special teams can be found in the [Special Teams Handbook](#)