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Lafayette Participates in Regional Drill for Large Scale Emergency

Submitted by Carol Yates



From left: LEPC commissioners Mike Melewicz and Carol Yates, County Health Service representative Ken Binkley, LEPC commissioner Duncan Seibert Photo provided

Members of the Lafayette Emergency Preparedness Commission recently attended a regional anthrax drill in El Cerrito. Commissioners Michael Melewicz, Duncan Seibert, and Carol Yates joined Contra Costa Health Services, American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), and county wide volunteers to participate in the exercise.

The drill practiced the establishment of a mock "point-of-dispensing," or POD, site and the delivery of emergency supplies. During the two and half hours the POD was operational, 870 mock doses of life saving medication were distributed.

Training exercises such as these help the City of Lafayette to be able to rapidly respond to disasters such as an earthquake, wildfire, hazardous material spill, or act of terrorism. Though this drill focused on the response to a bioterrorism event, the planning and collaboration that took place as part of this exercise will help prepare Lafayette for any type of health emergency.

Following the 2001 anthrax attacks, the federal government directed all health departments in the United States to develop plans to rapidly and safely provide medication to the public in the event of a public health emergency. The current exercise was organized by Bay Area Mass Prophylaxis Working Group, formed to coordinate planning and response efforts, which also created the website www.BayAreaDisasterMeds.org to provide the public with information on where to get medication in the event of a real emergency. You can help speed up the process by going to this website and filling out a form to keep ready in the event it is needed.

The goal for Lafayette is to distribute medication within 48 hours to all 23,000 residents and first responders in the event of a chemical or biological attack. In case of such an incident requiring emergency mass oral antibiotics prophylaxis, the Lafayette Police Department will receive the antibiotic supplies through the county and ensure delivery of them to the Lafayette POD operations site. Volunteers who have been trained will assist in dispensing.

LEPC commissioners also recently attended a FEMA-sponsored program and a statewide exercise to study concepts, plans, and capabilities related to a patient surge during a potential anthrax exposure with a focus on delivering key messages to the public.

Commissioner Michelle Heckle and chair Fred Lothrop keep the commission, including Sherry Hoover and George Figone, informed on the educational programs. The commission works closely with Chief Eric Christensen and Cathy Moscato of the Lafayette Police Department, and Dennis Rein, Emergency Coordinator for Lamorinda. For more information, email lepccarol@gmail.com.

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