



CHRIS NOCCO, SHERIFF

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

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April 16, 2012

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis, Chairman
The Honorable Laura Richardson, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications
House Homeland Security Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Bilirakis, Representative Richardson and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Pasco Sheriff's Office and the citizens of Pasco County, Florida, I would like to thank Chairman Bilirakis for the invitation to testify today on the needs and countermeasures for first responders to a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, or Explosive (CBRNE) attack. Although some may not believe that this is a clear or present threat for our community, those of us who are on the front lines of law enforcement truly understand the gravity of the risk.

Pasco County encompasses 745 square miles and has an estimated population of 480,000; this does not include our seasonal residents. Pasco is in the heart of the Tampa Bay Region in proximity to the City of Tampa and a coastline along the Gulf of Mexico. We are a diverse community whose number one economic engine is agriculture. In the near term, we anticipate significant growth in areas of finance, education, technology, and the health care industry.

The consequences of CBRNE emergencies will stretch our response and recovery capabilities. No matter the nature or severity of a CBRNE event, it will be the local first responders who will provide the initial operational response and oversee crisis management. The Pasco Sheriff's Office is the primary provider of law enforcement services to 89% of the county and provides specialized services and mutual aid to the four incorporated cities— we are the first responders and at the forefront of this issue.

The State of Florida established regional teams to respond to CBRNE incidents. When these teams were selected, our Sheriff's Office was not designated as part of a regional team. If a large scale CBRNE incident was to occur in Pasco County we would be forced to rely upon regional, state, and federal specialist response components to assist with disaster management, investigation, and to provide a sufficient level of emergency response. Specialist advice and resources would also be required as part of the recovery management phase, including the provision of long term health monitoring, psychological support, building and environmental decontamination, re-establishing public confidence and supporting a return to normality.

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Understanding that your time is limited and with this opportunity to speak with you today, I would like to take a few moments to explain the concerns of the Pasco Sheriff's Office. These recommendations and thoughts are intended to convey the perspective not only of a law enforcement executive, but those of a front line deputy.

- Caches of pre-positioned personal and institutional medical countermeasures should be afforded to law enforcement first responders similar to the process developed for postal employees. Law enforcement agencies will be in the forefront of operations in a biological disaster and it is critical that our personnel are available and safe to perform their duties.
- When initiating a program to distribute the anthrax vaccine for first responders in case of a biological attack, please allow local law enforcement agencies, along with other emergency services, a voice in making the decision as to who will be defined as a "first responder". There are many components to our Sheriff's Office that will be in need of this vaccine beyond our sworn deputies. This would include our communications section and the medical staff in our jail to name a few. There are other services in our local county government that would fully support our operations and if they do not enter a "hot" zone to support us because they are not properly vaccinated, our capabilities would suffer tremendously. Local law enforcement agencies deserve a seat at the decision table when defining the term "first responder" because we are the immediate boots on the ground in any situation.
- As we are discussing countermeasures, we need to mention CBRN protective suits. Although every law enforcement officer should have a protective suit, but does not at this time, we should immediately ensure that our special operation units have them. SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics Team) and SERT (Special Emergency Response Team) teams across the country should be the first provided with protective suits and equipment to respond to a CBRNE attack. We often think a CBRNE attack will be a large scale disaster affecting a large metropolitan area. One of the main goals of a terrorist is to maximize fear in a society. What greater fear and easier access can be achieved with minimal resources required than for a terrorist to attack a school, church, synagogue, or mall with a CBRNE component in their operation, such as a dirty bomb? In such an incident, this would probably include an active shooter/ hostage situation. What greater sense of hopelessness could we have than if our specialty teams, who can arrive on the scene quickly, stood on the perimeter not able to advance into the situation because we are not properly prepared to go into an active situation that requires protective suits?

Although this hearing is focused on countermeasures, I would be negligent in my duties to you, the deputies I stand with, and the citizens we serve if I did not raise the issue of the most critical piece of emergency response that is still missing today: interoperable communication. The best plans for the worst disasters are useless if we cannot communicate with each other. Today, ten

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years removed from the events of 9/11, we, as a country, have not fully addressed one of our greatest failures and that is the ability of all first responders to seamlessly communicate with each other on a secure frequency. In my humble opinion, this should remain our first priority for funding, for it is the catalyst for success in the response to any incident. The Tampa Bay Region is in need of a fully interoperable communication system. As federal dollars are distributed for homeland security issues, I would encourage you to make interoperable communication the top priority.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of these concerns. May God continue to bless the men and women of the Pasco Sheriff's Office and all first responders throughout America.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Nocco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Chris Nocco
Sheriff, Pasco County, Florida