Oregon Radiation Protection Project Cited as National Example

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Oregon's effort to protect communities from a radiation incident is featured in a new national report as an example of how states are using federal preparedness dollars to strengthen their defenses against public health threats.

The report describes an Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) project that is distributing radiation monitoring equipment throughout the state, said Terry Lindsey, radiation protection manager in the DHS Public Health Division.

"Rural areas will be better protected and better able to respond to a radiation incident," said Lindsey. "We want to make sure that every Oregonian is protected, no matter where they live."

The DHS Public Health Division used U.S. Department of Homeland Security funds to purchase 60 radiation monitoring kits. The kits are being given to hospitals and some health clinics throughout Oregon, with rural areas getting first priority for delivery.

The kits contain instruments that enable medical personnel to screen radiation-contaminated patients as they come into emergency rooms to prevent contamination of medical personnel and the hospital.

"As kits are delivered, DHS trains medical staff on how to handle patients with radioactive contamination in a safe and protective manner," said Lindsey.

DHS also is arranging for radiological equipment to be loaned to up to four universities, which will help ensure that radiological expertise exists in regions beyond the Portland metropolitan area. The equipment may be used daily in science classes but can quickly be deployed in an emergency.

Lindsey noted that once distribution and training are complete, Oregon will have four layers of response to radiation incidents: â€¢ At least one hospital or medical clinic in each rural county will have equipment and trained personnel. â€¢ A minimum of three people in each of 16 regional HAZMAT teams will have received specialized radiological response training. â€¢ All 16 HAZMAT teams already have radiation monitoring kits and continue to receive updated training for new team members. â€¢ DHS Public Health Division has a radiological response team and equipment in place to respond as needed to any radiation incident.

The radiation protection program is one of many DHS programs that work to protect the health of Oregonians. Program staff conduct radiation response training sessions in communities, help develop local response plans and coordinate exercises that test the radiation response system.

The project was featured in the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers report on how health agencies have used federal preparedness funds and is on the Web at www.astho.org/pubs/StatesofPreparedness2006.pdf.

Information on Oregon's program is on the Web at www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/rps/index.shtml

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