



Homeland Security & The Agriculture Infrastructure

WSDA Homeland Security Focus

Background

Since September 11, 2001, our nation's preparation for the defense against terrorism and disasters has dramatically increased in tempo. The Agriculture Infrastructure sector of Washington State's economy is valued at \$42 billion dollars. The farm-gate production for 2007 was \$8.41 billion. Our state has 36,000 farms, with 15.3 million acres in production. In February 2004, the President signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive #9, establishing a national policy to defend this vital sector against terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies. WSDA recognized the need to actively plan for agroterrorism and both natural and man-made disasters. The agency established the All Hazard Safety, Security, and Emergency Management Team to plan for preventing, protecting, responding to, and recovering from agroterrorism, natural, and man-made disasters. Working with local, state, and federal agencies, and private sector stakeholders, WSDA has implemented the process to begin addressing the requirements of this Presidential Directive. In addition to the preparedness for terrorism, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the winter storms that impacted Washington in late 2007, and again the winter storms in December 2008 brought about the realization that the state and the nation needs to be prepared for all hazards, both natural and man-made.

Overview

The Washington State Department of Agriculture not only recognizes the threat that terrorism presents, but also the very real possibility of a natural or man-made disasters. Ongoing WSDA activities are in progress to educate, train, and prepare Washington's economically vital agriculture sector, should we be faced with a natural disaster, food contamination, foreign animal disease, or an agri-terrorism scenario. The Committee on Homeland Security (CHS), a subcommittee of the Governor's Emergency Management Council, developed a comprehensive strategy to enhance preparedness and response to natural or man-made incidents or disasters. This strategy encompasses a statewide comprehensive vulnerability assessment that includes the agriculture infrastructure in light of an all-hazards approach. This comprehensive agriculture sector assessment encompasses a "Farm to Fork" assessment strategy. Based on the results of this assessment, decisions have been made that address the planning, training, exercising and equipment needs of local and state jurisdictions, frontline responders, and emergency managers, in all critical infrastructure sectors.

Collaboration

To implement the goals of the Washington State All – Hazards Emergency Preparedness Strategic Plan 2009-2014, WSDA in conjunction with the Washington State Department of Health established the CHS Agriculture Subcommittee. This subcommittee brings together not only the government agencies mandated to protect food and agriculture, but also the agriculture industry itself, from the producers to the retail markets – "Farm to Fork".

Washington State Department of Agriculture worked very closely with response agencies from local jurisdictions and state and federal agencies to respond to the devastation caused by the winter storms that impacted western Washington in December of 2007 and 2008. The Department worked closely with the local agencies to ensure carcass disposal was accomplished, organic farms were tested to ensure they met their organic certification after the floods, embargoed food products as necessary to protect the public, and assisted producers with obtaining assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture, Farm

Service Agency. The agency assisted in the coordination for heavy debris removal from farm fields and State Disaster Assistance to farmers.

The interface between these organizations and individuals brings into play coordinated efforts to prevent incidents from happening; prepare for the response to an incident if it happens; respond quickly and effectively in the event of an incident; and quickly and effectively recover from an incident of a type affecting agriculture in Washington State. This collaboration has extended across our borders with neighboring states and provinces.

For example, WSDA developed a Rural Crime Prevention Program in conjunction with the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to help our vital industry protect its assets. Knowing that diseases respect no man-made boundary, WSDA has also continued to coordinate the adjoining states and British Columbia to ensure an integrated response in the event of a major disaster or disease outbreak. In addition WSDA has been an integral part in the US security planning for the upcoming 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Planning

Washington State agriculture is one of two state priorities in the Washington State All – Hazards Emergency Preparedness Strategic Plan 2009-2014 Plan. The Plan ensures Washington can address issues which involve agriculture. WSDA has not only had to plan for local disasters but also has been involved in the assisting with response to national disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. As potential vulnerable facilities, sites, and processes are identified, WSDA staff works with all segments of the agriculture sector to enhance awareness, security, preparedness, and response planning capabilities. Initial focus for these efforts is identification of “gaps” in existing response plans and procedures, and identification of vulnerabilities and weaknesses that could endanger our food supply.

Equipment, Training and Exercises

The Washington Military Department, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Grants and Training are providing assistance to the Washington State Department of Agriculture in the form of grant opportunities and technical assistance that address our training and equipment needs as related to Agri-terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction. WSDA has purchased and distributed response equipment, trained responders, and has exercised agriculture responders in the use of that equipment. Training opportunities have been made available to all levels of government, volunteers, and the agriculture industry. The focus of this training is on the response protocols, and the National Incident Management System - Incident Command System that would be utilized in Agri-Terrorism/Weapons of Mass Destruction incident and non-terrorism emergencies and natural disasters. Other assistance that is provided to local and state jurisdictions, volunteers, and the agriculture industry are opportunities to participate as partners, in a full range of realistic drills and exercises that include seminars, tabletops, and full-scale exercises, at the state, regional, and national levels.

Contact

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