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COUNTY EXECUTIVE SPANO URGES PEOPLE NOT TO PANIC ABOUT ANTHRAX
Says county is fully prepared to deal with threat, but stresses how unlikely an event is

Special County hotline established; other specific information available at www.westchestergov.com

In respond to an Anthrax case today in New York City, County Executive Andy Spano wants to reassure Westchester residents that his administration is fully prepared to deal with any instances of bio-terrorism, however unlikely they may be.

“Through our Departments of Emergency Services, Public Safety and Health, we have a multi-faceted program in place to deal with these kinds of threats, including a sophisticated, fully staffed Hazardous Material team to deal with any suspicious substances,” he said. “They are on call 24-hours a day, and it’s their job to investigate these reports. To date, they have found nothing suspicious in Westchester.”

He added, “In the very unlikely case of any bio-terrorism here in Westchester, we are prepared.”

Spano also directed the county Department of Health to establish a special information line, 813-5609, which will be staffed until 11 p.m. tonight and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Other information is available at a new county website reachable from www.westchestergov.com. This site explains what bio-terrorism is, how Anthrax and other such diseases are transmitted, what their symptoms are and what people can do to protect themselves. Special links for physicians are also included.

The county executive noted that even before Friday’s New York City case, Westchester has had in place procedures relating to Anthrax or any other biochemical terrorism. These include:

- The Haz Mat team, which is prepared to quickly swing into action to take samples of any suspicious items as well as quarantine an area, if necessary;

- Daily phone calls by the county's Health Department to all county hospitals asking about any unusual cases. To date, no suspicious cases have been found;
- A cooperative effort between the county and its hospitals to establish uniform procedures for dealing with any bio-terrorism cases, if they occur;
- Sharing of information with area police departments so they know of the proper procedure to take upon a report of a suspicious package;
- Assistance to all public and private water suppliers on how to tighten their security to prevent any contamination of their supplies.

Residents who think they have come in contact with Anthrax or have come across a suspicious package should immediately contact their local police department. While in all probability the substance will prove to be something non toxic, each and every case will be handled appropriately, Spano said.

In addition, he advised businesses to review their mail room procedures to minimize the possibility of contamination from a letter or package.

“Our attitude is simple: people should take reasonable precautions, but they should not panic,” Spano said.

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