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**WESTCHESTER AWARDS SEVEN GRANTS FOR BIO-TERRORISM PREPAREDNESS  
Grants are part of comprehensive bio-terrorism plan to prepare for major public health emergencies**

County Executive Andy Spano, Rep. Nita Lowey and County Health Commissioner Josh Lipsman today unveiled the county's comprehensive bio-terrorism plan and announced nearly \$100,000 in grants to fund seven projects as part of that plan.

A rapid-response decontamination team and an emergency preparedness web portal, both to be created by the Westchester Medical Center, were among the projects to be funded as part of a larger county plan to prepare for bio-terrorism. The county plans initially to spend more than \$1.8 million on nine projects. One million of that money comes from federal funds secured by Lowey and announced last January.

The bio-terrorism preparedness plan is part of a larger effort, begun by the Spano administration before Sept. 11, to improve emergency preparedness in Westchester.

"Even before Sept. 11, we knew that Westchester's unique characteristics -- its reservoirs, its nuclear power plants and its major corporations -- made it a potential target," said Spano. "We had already begun working on a bio-terrorism plan and were working to improve our emergency response plan for Indian Point. After Sept. 11, the urgency of what we were doing became clear. Thanks to Nita Lowey, we have the funds we need to expedite our emergency preparedness plans. Today we are announcing the first of several actions we will be taking to make sure we are ready to respond if there should be a radiological, biological or chemical attack. I want to thank Nita Lowey for providing these funds to help us train first responders, to inventory our resources and coordinate emergency efforts. It is our hope that we will never have to test these plans."

Said Nita Lowey of the funding, "The events of September 11 and the anthrax attacks that followed have forever altered our sense of security."

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She added, “I have worked to make homeland security a top priority in Washington, but the best way to ensure our community’s safety and help Westchester residents regain confidence is to continually upgrade our local public health services. With the funds I secured, County Executive Spano has been able to put in place a comprehensive emergency response plan that will better prepare our first responders, establish a 21<sup>st</sup> century health communication system, and recruit and train needed volunteers.”

Spano said the grants announced today are part of an ambitious blueprint mapped out by the health department with the cooperation of the Department of Emergency Services to try to coordinate public health emergency preparedness in the county.

One of the largest projects will be to upgrade Westchester County’s Department of Labs and Research so sophisticated testing that now has to be sent to state labs can be done quickly in the event of biological or chemical terrorism.

Dr. Lipsman said that the funding provided by the federal government has allowed the health department to strengthen its bio-terrorism efforts without hurting other health department projects. He said the health department will use the initial \$1.8 million in federal and state money to fund the bio-terrorism project in 2002 and 2003 and expects to receive additional funds in future years.

“I am pleased to see all of these initiatives being supported by federal funding as they are crucial to strengthening the infrastructure of public health and our capacity to respond to a bio-terrorism scenario,” said Dr. Lipsman. “This funding allows the Health Department to develop its preparedness for a bio-terrorism event without lessening the resources available to deal with our every day public health activities.”

The following seven bio-terrorism grants were awarded today to help the county respond in the event of a biological, chemical and/or radiological event:

- **\$12,500 to Westchester Medical Center, Trauma and Emergency Services** to develop a web-based emergency preparedness portal for health care providers to coordinate and inventory available resources – hospital beds, medications, supplies etc.
- **\$15,000 to Westchester Medical Center, Trauma and Emergency Services** to establish a portable emergency triage station demo project to be used to evaluate mass casualties.
- **\$15,000 to Westchester Medical Center, Trauma and Emergency Services** to purchase equipment and to establish and train rapid response teams to deal with mass decontamination.

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- **\$14,450 to Phelps Memorial Hospital, Emergency Life Support Programs** to develop and offer county EMS providers a 32-hour course on decontamination.
- **\$15,000 to New York Metro 2 Disaster Medical Assistance Team** to train para-professional and professional volunteer teams to respond to biological, chemical and radiological emergencies.
- **15,000 to the Westchester Chapter of the American Red Cross** to train volunteers to help feed, shelter and clothe the public in the event of a public health emergency.
- **\$10,000 to the Westchester County Medical Society** to find ways to coordinate and create an emergency communications network for private health care providers using state and county web-based resources.

The mini-grants represent the first of several initiatives in the entire bio-terrorism plan. The balance of the \$1 million will be spent on the following projects:

- **A secure Internet Health Alert Network** to allow medical professionals to share information to help identify early outbreaks or unusual occurrences of illness.
- **An All-Hazards Emergency Response Plan**, expanding on the County's existing plan, will be developed to respond to emergencies such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks with biological, chemical, or radiological agents.
- **Two Tabletop Exercise Training Drills.** The first will test Health Department staff's ability to detect, identify and respond to a public health emergency; in this case a pandemic flu. The second will test the All-Hazards Emergency Response Plan using representatives of public health agencies, emergency management, medical response, and public safety.
- **Hospital Emergency Room Evaluations.** Architectural engineering firm of Bernstein and Associates will look at hospital emergency rooms' ability to triage and decontaminate large numbers of patients in the event of biological, radiological, or chemical contamination, as well as to handle even a single case of a particularly contagious illness such as smallpox. This analysis will give hospitals an idea of what changes are needed to help them improve response to a massive terrorism event.

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- **Upgrade Westchester County’s Lab Facility to a Bio-Safety Level-3.** The Valhalla lab will be renovated and new environmental monitoring equipment purchased to make it one of the most sophisticated in the state. This will allow the laboratory to conduct on-the-spot testing in the event of chemical or biological terrorism locally.
- **Satellite Hook-up for Area Hospitals** will provide real-time audio and video communication to allow hospitals to communicate via satellite with health department facilities and other health care professionals for rapid response to unusual outbreaks of illnesses.
- **Training for Mass Care Volunteers.** This would create a team of trained volunteers to assist in triage and coordinate public reception centers, register the public, administer medications or vaccines, and assist with logistical tasks related to mass care.
- **A Volunteer Database** to track and monitor credentials and readiness of volunteers trained in mass care.
- **A Patient Database/Intake Form** will be developed for use at reception centers or triage centers to assess the individual’s need for medical care. This will allow staff to track patient treatment and or release status, as well as referrals for hospital care or follow-up.

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