

# Keep the Bioterrorism Laboratory (BT Lab) in Eastern Washington

Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) is the only Regional Public Health Laboratory in Eastern Washington that is federally certified to receive and test select agents of bioterrorism concern – and we are in jeopardy of closing.

## BACKGROUND:

- ♦ The BT Lab was established in 2004, funded by a Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ♦ We test for clinical and environmental specimens for bioterrorism agents.
- ♦ Our key partners and stakeholders include: local law enforcement, state law enforcement, federal law enforcement, Fire/EMS/Hazmat, United States Postal Service, local and regional hospitals, and Public Health – local and state.

## STATUS:

- ♦ Annually, 100% of specimens received are tested at 100% proficiency.
- ♦ Organisms tested: *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax), *Burkholderia mallei* (glanders), *Burkholderia pseudomallei* (melioidosis), *Brucella* sp. (brucellosis), *Francisella tularensis* (tularemia), *Yersinia pestis* (plague), Othropoxvirus, Ricin toxin
- ♦ Currently, the BT Lab is funded through December 31, 2013.

Annual total cost: \$170,000  
- \$20,000 (CDC grant)  
- \$20,000 (SRHD local dollars)  
**\$130,000 needed to sustain BT Lab beyond 2013**

## CONSEQUENCES OF CLOSURE:

- SRHD serves as primary backup facility to the Public Health State Laboratory for the BT Level 3 capability. In 2012, SRHD served as the primary lab during a 9-month remodel at the state lab. Without the redundancy of an east side – west side lab, we **become dependent on the state labs of our neighboring states** and lose the ability to influence how they operate and service our state.
- Without local capabilities, government offices that have received a threat would be **closed for the day as opposed to a few hours** to accommodate specimen transport time and testing time.
- Patient samples from the regional hospitals may take an additional 24 to 48 hours for confirmation of results **increasing mortality rates and the possibility of additional exposures or unnecessary treatments** as precautionary measures.
- The closest testing facility outside of Spokane is in Shoreline, WA (approximately 300 miles away involving a mountain pass prone to occasional closure during winter months), **adding a minimum of 5 hours to testing and threat identification**. Other testing facilities are located in Portland, OR, Helena, MT, and Boise, ID.
- Specimen samples can be shipped via FedEx or Greyhound with appropriate packaging and Chain of Custody. Packaging and shipping capability lies solely with a BT Lab Microbiologist. **Other qualified persons will need to be identified, trained and supported** to meet this need.



## EXAMPLES OF SPECIMENS

### TESTED:

#### 2006

7 samples including white powder letter to jail

#### 2007

8 samples including threat letters to GU Athletic Director and TV stations

#### 2008

14 samples including threat from China and a sample from police evidence room where woman who handled it died shortly thereafter

#### 2009

15 samples including unknown liquid and powder from a storage unit with a recipe for making ricin toxin

#### 2010

13 samples including a patient sample testing positive for plague

#### 2011

8 samples including the Martin Luther King Jr. Parade suspect backpack and a patient testing positive for tularemia

#### 2012

8 samples including a patient sample testing positive for brucellosis



**Bioterrorism Laboratory**

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