

CDC Standing Guard



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When the tsunami and earthquake hit Japan and led to a nuclear plant accident, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began assembling its team to assist Japan with this unprecedented emergency.

“I was getting ready for church when the phone rang,” recalled Jana Telfer, head of communication for CDC’s National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. “I picked up the phone and was told that I was being deployed to Japan immediately!”

No one was surprised that Jana, a respected veteran in emergency and risk communication, would be sent to provide communication support during this crisis situation. However, Jana travelled nearly 24-hours to her destination not knowing what to expect, but equipped to jump immediately into action.

Jana was just one of the most recent groups of CDC professionals who travel across the country and around the globe to respond to public health issues. In the past 2 years, CDC conducted more than 750 field investigations, including Epi-Aids, in 49 states, 5 U.S. territories and at least 35 different countries. At the request of state or local health authorities, CDC conducts Epidemic-Aids (known as “Epi-Aids”) to assist with urgent public health problems or emergencies. CDC’s primary role during Epi-Aids is to make recommendations and/or provide technical support to stop or lessen public health threats. The Emergency Operations Center within CDC has been activated 49 times in 11 years to respond to complex national and international public health emergencies when lives can depend on quick, efficient, and scientifically sound actions.

Jana worked out of the U.S. Embassy in Japan, directly consulting with U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos on advice for American citizens working and military members and their family assigned to Japan. The U.S. citizens there, like the Japanese citizenry, were fearful about radiation. For 21 days, she worked tirelessly almost around the clock with State Department, U.S. Embassy, military and Japanese government officials, both in Japan and in the United States, to develop the right communication materials to provide sound, timely information about the public health threat from natural disasters and possible radiation exposure.

This is just one emergency incident and one of many stories and about how CDC experts leap into action to stand guard when emergencies happen.

The CDC plays a vital role in America’s security, vigilantly standing guard 24/7 against bioterrorist threats, disease

outbreaks, and environmental hazards. In addition to directly responding, CDC contributes by building and supporting a strong public health system around our country that can respond quickly to emerging threats.

CDC has been called upon to respond to some the greatest emergencies in recent history here in the U.S. and around the world, in addition to the Japan earthquake, including:

- **2009 H1N1 Pandemic** – CDC led the U.S. public health system response to the pandemic. The agency rapidly identified the novel 2009 H1N1 virus, developed a test to diagnose infection with the virus, developed a candidate vaccine virus used to make a safe and effective vaccine and coordinated a nationwide vaccination program that was launched 6 months after the new virus was detected.
- **2010 Haiti earthquake** – The 2010 earthquake in Haiti killed hundreds of thousands and decimated the country’s public health infrastructure. CDC tracked closely in Haiti for potential outbreaks from the damage and helped rebuild Haiti’s damaged public health capacity. Since the earthquake, CDC has stood up national health information systems to help officials identify needs and target help where it’s needed. These systems proved essential during a recent cholera outbreak, when Haitian health officials, with support from CDC, tracked the spread of disease, established treatment facilities and conducted training for volunteers and health professionals. As a result, cholera deaths were reduced to fewer than one percent in less than three months.
- **2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill** – In the largest accidental marine oil spill in history, the Deepwater Horizon explosion and subsequent oil spill released nearly 5 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. CDC immediately started to document exposure and identify potential health threats. CDC developed safety and health recommendations to protect the more than 55,000 workers involved in the cleanup effort.

Since its founding 65 years ago, CDC has earned a global reputation for its 24/7 emergency response expertise, abilities and contributions. The agency’s uniquely trained staff, including epidemiologists, medical officers, occupational physicians and industrial hygienists, radiation experts, communicators, and public health analysts, provide the fuel for achieving its mission of saving lives and protecting people.

CDC has a proven ability to work with, advise and assist its national and global partners during health emergencies. A renewed commitment to public health is vital to ensure communities across the nation continue to enjoy safety, prosperity and quality of life.

For information about CDC, visit www.cdc.gov/24-7.

CDC 24/7: Saving lives. Protecting people. Saving money through prevention.