

## INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING FOR RADIATION EMERGENCIES

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Persons providing health care pride themselves on their ability to handle emergencies. This pride is born of the daily experience of caring for the sick and injured. Emergencies include traumatic injuries, sudden changes in health status, and various minor disturbances in the physical environment inside the hospital. The effectiveness of this ability is unquestioned in limited-scale problems. However, survey experience of the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH) reveals weaknesses when health care organizations are faced with larger scale problems such as earthquakes and plane crashes. One may speculate that a massive emergency such as occurred at Chernobyl would overwhelm this ability.

Based on the same survey experience, JCAH believes that health care organizations can plan and train to prepare for large-scale emergencies in a careful and systematic manner. Through such study and practice, their existing confidence and ability to deal with limited emergencies can be expanded.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The JCAH addresses emergency planning and preparedness in two sections of its 1987 Accreditation Manual for Hospitals. In the emergency services standard, reference is made to disaster planning as a responsibility of the emergency services director. One of the specific subjects mentioned is preparing to receive and treat victims of radiation exposure or contamination. In the section on plant, technology and safety management, the emergency preparedness standard lists key elements of plans and procedures for dealing with any emergency situation that exceeds normal working capabilities of one or more components of the health care organization.

Both references emphasize the need for an organized, consistent planning process to address emergencies. The JCAH suggests that the process consist of four steps: problem identification, problem analysis, problem resolution, and evaluation and modification of plans.

Problem Identification: This is the key step to developing an effective plan. If the parameters of the problem are clearly identified, the solution is often obvious. During the problem identification phase, the organization needs to consider three important aspects. First

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