

National Veterinary Stockpile and State of Texas Conduct Successful Logistics Exercise

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) partnered with Texas agencies to conduct the Texas and National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS) Logistics Exercise on October 30, 2013 in San Antonio, Texas. The full-scale exercise focused on the logistical requirements for delivering and managing supplies, vaccines, and equipment field responders will need during the initial stages of a damaging animal disease outbreak.

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and the NVS program hosted the exercise, and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) provided a warehouse facility and equipment, as well as key staff to help plan and conduct the exercise. The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) also provided support to protect the health of agricultural responders in the simulated scenario. The exercise illustrated the partnership between APHIS, TAHC, TDEM, and DSHS to respond logistically to an animal disease outbreak. Personnel from seventeen state and local agencies, industry and non-governmental organizations, and federal entities such as FEMA Region VI and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attended the exercise in the roles of players, observers, evaluators, and controllers.

A full-scale exercise is a complex event that required prolonged and detailed planning for almost two years. To ensure an effective exercise, a diverse group of subject matter experts and representatives from numerous agencies took part in the planning process. "This exercise is a great example of multi-agency coordination, and we are grateful for the support from other state agencies including TDEM throughout our planning and exercise processes," said Dr. TR Lansford, TAHC Assistant Executive Director. "In the event of a catastrophic animal disease outbreak, we will count on these other agencies for support, and help with coordinating the resources that would be needed to mount an effective response."

"One of the unique components of our exercise was that we simulated the receipt of antiviral medications that might be needed to protect our animal health responders in a zoonotic disease event. Our state public health counterparts at the DSHS have embraced this as part of their mission and it's a great partnership and example of 'One Health,'" said Dr. Holly Hughes-Garza, lead NVS planner for TAHC.

The planning team developed a comprehensive exercise for testing Texas' logistics warehouse operations and inventory management. The team elected to use both a foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and a highly pathogenic avian influenza scenario, because either disease could have consequences severe enough for the State to request NVS countermeasures. The combined scenarios also allowed Texas and the NVS to test the deployment of varied countermeasures: the FMD scenario prompted the deployment of vaccines and the H5N1 scenario prompted the deployment of high respiratory protection supplies and human antiviral medications.

The planning team selected objectives to evaluate Federal and State logistics response plans, identify areas for improvement, and exercise interagency collaboration. The objectives were designed to validate portions of the draft *TAHC Logistics Plan (April 2013)* and the draft *TAHC Logistics and NVS Operating Guide (April 2013)*; validate the NVS's ability to respond to a Texas request for NVS countermeasures; validate the NVS's ability to deploy NVS countermeasures; and validate Texas's ability to conduct logistics warehouse and inventory management operations.

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Two months prior to the exercise, NVS personnel conducted logistics training in Austin, Texas to teach exercise participants about warehouse operations and inventory management functions they would perform during the exercise. The training also gave players an opportunity to review their exercise roles and practice key functions.

The exercise kicked off on October 25th with state and federal animal health officials receiving the scenario through a series of emails. Animal health officials in the TAHC, APHIS VS Western Region, and the Texas VS Area office made the decision that NVS countermeasures were needed to respond to the scenario. The NVS headquarters staff validated the NVS request process in real-time. During the request process, all entities provided the required information to request an NVS deployment.

The supply unit leader and his staff prepared the warehouse on October 29th to receive deployed NVS countermeasures and simulated FMD vaccine, and to manage inventory. Preparations included mobilizing staff, preparing for warehouse activities, and coordinating with other key incident command staff and technical specialists. The ordering manager uploaded the NVS shipment file in preparation to receive the countermeasures.

NVS deployed countermeasures and an NVS mobile logistics team (MLT) to the San Antonio warehouse on October 30th to support warehouse logistics operations for the simulated FMD and H5N1 response. A series of briefings kicked off the exercise. Participants were prepared for the day's schedule and informed about the exercise scenario, the resources required to respond immediately, and the justification to request Federal assistance from the NVS program.

Following the briefings, the tractor trailer containing NVS countermeasures for the exercise backed up to the warehouse door and the warehouse play began. Players reacted to exercise injects and took the necessary actions to respond to a variety of simulated circumstances. The receiving and distribution manager directed warehouse teams to offload the shipment using a forklift, inspect for damages and shortages, and store each tri-wall container in its predetermined storage location on the warehouse floor. The ordering and inventory managers remained busy responding to injects throughout the exercise that required inventory controls. They processed requests for supplies from responders in the field, generated pick sheets, monitored and adjusted on-hand balances, and forwarded reorder requests while managing other tasks.

Multiple injects for the warehouse teams required them to pick a variety of supplies from the NVS 24 hour push packs, move them to staging, and prepare them for distribution to field responders. The NVS shipment contained simulated FMD vaccine which required specialized cold chain management. Warehouse teams quickly unloaded the simulated vaccine, checked its temperature to ensure the required temperature was maintained during transit, conducted inventory, and quickly stored it in the NVS mobile refrigeration unit.

Exercise observers were provided the opportunity to view the exercise from designated observation areas. The injects and expected actions were reviewed with the exercise play, providing observers with the details of the day's activities as they unfolded. As the exercise came to a close, the warehouse facility was shut down and returned to normal operations. During this time, warehouse teams and managers conducted actions to return accountable NVS

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countermeasures to the warehouse, pack and prepare them for return, and load them back onto the tractor trailer for return shipment to the NVS program. All exercise participants were involved in the hotwash to identify positive attributes, areas for improvement, and lessons learned. The exercise was planned, designed, and conducted in accordance with guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP).

The Texas and NVS logistics exercise succeeded in training players to request, receive, and manage NVS countermeasures. The advanced NVS logistics training session allowed exercise players to learn their duties and enhanced cooperation among all organizations. The exercise was also successful at validating portions of the draft *TAHC Logistics Plan (April 2013)* and the draft *TAHC Logistics and NVS Operating Guide (April 2013)* for the first time. Participants received valuable hands on experience that will help Texas leaders finalize the Texas plan and operating guide. The exercise also provided an opportunity for NVS personnel to test their capabilities to support a State request for assistance, particularly the new mobile refrigeration unit. Overall, the exercise was an excellent training and team-building event.

According to Rodney White, NVS Director, “This full-scale exercise demonstrated the commitment of the NVS program to support our state animal health partners. It provided emergency responders in Texas an opportunity to have hands-on experience working with NVS countermeasures they would need in the event of an animal disease outbreak, and allowed an equal opportunity for NVS personnel to respond as they would in a real emergency.”

The NVS is the national repository of critical veterinary supplies, equipment, animal vaccines, and services that can be deployed to the site of a damaging animal disease outbreak within 24 hours. A major goal of the NVS program is to help states, tribal nations, and U.S. territories plan, train, and exercise for the receipt, management, and distribution of NVS countermeasures during a logistics emergency response.

All states, tribes, and U.S. territories are encouraged to develop a written NVS plan to ensure responders receive the NVS countermeasures they need. For planning tools, question and answer documents, and other information, visit the NVS website at <http://nvs.aphis.usda.gov>.

TX NVS Warehouse Set Up



Refresher and Just-In-Time Training



Exercise Play



Cold Chain Management



Dispensing Human Antiviral Medication



Observer Opportunities

