

The Laboratory Response Network Celebrates 10 Years of Achievements
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The Laboratory Response Network (LRN) celebrated its ten-year anniversary during the 2009 LRN National Meeting in Orlando, Florida from April 1-3, 2009. The 291-person meeting convened with an innovative and well received keynote address in the form of a video entitled “The LRN: A Decade of Achievements.” The general sessions covered a wide array of topics, ranging from the LRN’s accomplishments to its future endeavors, while break-out sessions focused on opportunities to explore current strategies to maintain the LRN.

During a biological agents break-out session, staff from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presented on quality assurance activities underway for the LRN. Harvey Holmes, PhD, Branch Chief, Laboratory Response Branch, Division of Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response kicked off the session, which addressed evaluation studies of DNA extraction methods for bacterial bioterrorism agents, limit of detection studies for real-time PCR assays and quality assurance for automated extraction instruments. The quality assurance discussions were immediately followed by noteworthy presentations on meeting the needs of the select agent program. The session moderator, J. Royden Saah, MS, Bioterrorism Laboratory Coordinator for the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health remarked that he was pleased to see CDC engage LRN member laboratories in their continuous quality improvement initiatives. Further, an interactive presentation by APHL staff members Chris Mangal, MPH, director of Emergency Preparedness & Response and Anthony Barkey, MPH, Emergency Preparedness and Response program manager elicited audience participation through polling to determine the effectiveness of the Laboratory Preparedness Exercise (LPX).

During the chemical agents breakout session, Jennifer Jenner, PhD, coordinator for the Chemical Terrorism Response Laboratory at the William A. Hinton State Laboratory Institute, part of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, briefed the audience on their collaboration efforts with the state Poison Control Center through a heartbreaking account of arsenic poisoning in a toddler and infant, in which the infant did not survive. However, due to rapid response and identification of the chemical agent involved, the toddler did make a full recovery. The anecdote illustrated the vital role chemical laboratories play in rapid identification of chemical agents, not just in emergency response situations, but in everyday life. Jennifer Beck, MHS, Environmental Health program manager and Barkey again caught the crowd's attention during a policy discussion communicating the results of the annual APHL All-Hazards Laboratory Preparedness Survey.

APHL's executive director, Scott Becker, MS delivered a keynote address on the importance of partnerships to enhance the LRN, stating, among other things that:

Partnership doesn't always have to arise as part of some vast strategic plan...a partnership can be simply defined as people sharing responsibility and cooperating to achieve a common goal.

The final keynote speaker and former APHL employee Asha George, DrPH, MSPH who currently serves as senior professional staff (democratic majority) for the Committee on Homeland Security with the US House of Representatives commended the success of the LRN and highlighted the value in planning for tomorrow. She emphasized the importance of disseminating information to, and gaining the support of, congressional staff and representatives in order to propagate legislation supporting the LRN and the state and local public health laboratories on which the network relies.

The continued positive feedback regarding the meeting sheds light on the successes of the past ten-years, and breathes new life into future endeavors of the LRN. By heeding the words of the final keynote speakers, the LRN can expect to not only survive, but thrive in the ever changing environment that is public health.