



also has the significant benefit of showing that, in the presence of a steady or falling rate of respiratory illness, an outbreak is not present.

During the Sydney Games the incidence of respiratory disease fell throughout the period of surveillance. Moreover, point of care data at the Olympic Village and residential cruise ships confirmed that no legionella or influenza outbreak was underway. Both of these diseases emerged as suggested problems during the Games, but timely information permitted prompt and repeated assurances that this was not the case.

Events have moved on and the feasibility of developing weaponised deliverable biological agents outside of state control is more apparent⁵. The manner in which small quantities of *Bacillus anthracis* can be disseminated within whole buildings is now known.

These factors suggest the future lies in institutionalising some of the links between health and law enforcement to better manage threats. Effort should be directed at the development of less labour intensive surveillance systems that piggy-back off clinical information systems so that they are ready to be used during a suspected attack and permit

health professionals to treat patients with available resources.

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The function of the National Chemical Biological and Radiological Working Group

The Tokyo sarin incident of March 1995 was a wake up call to emergency managers around the globe. What had been considered a remote possibility was now a chilling reality. The deliberate use of highly toxic chemical materials on an unsuspecting population was a new issue that now confronted emergency planners.

In Australia, following a workshop held at the Emergency Management Australia Institute at Mt Macedon in August 1995, a working party was established to examine the issue in more detail and make recommendations as to what measures should be taken to improve our national preparedness for similar incidents.

The Olympic Games provided additional impetus to improve our preparedness to respond to chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) incidents. A CBR sub-working party was established as part of

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the Olympic security framework to develop capabilities to respond to CBR incidents that could occur during the Games. The main focus was on developing CBR response capabilities in Sydney, including the Olympic venues. During the lead up to the games a number of measures were implemented that improved the capacity to respond.

Following the Games, it was decided that a national CBR forum should be established to build on the work done for the Games.

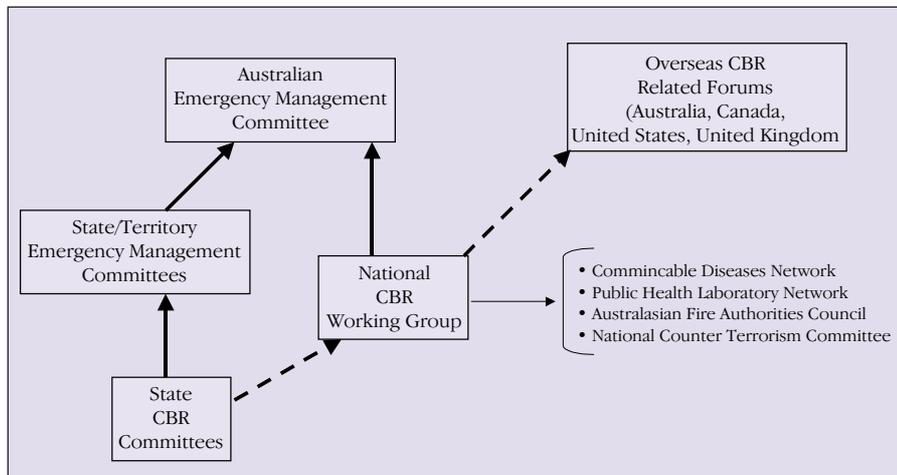
The National CBR Working Group sponsored by Emergency Management Australia was established and held its first meeting on 6-7 August 2001. The working group membership comprises the chairs of the respective State and Territories CBR committees, as well as Commonwealth agencies that have a key role to play during a CBR incident, and includes a representative from the Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN). The working group reports to the Australian Emergency Management Committee.

The terms of reference of the national CBR working group include:

- **Purpose:** To coordinate development of national CBR capabilities in Australia.
- **Objectives** are to:
 - Develop procedures and arrangements for dealing with a CBR incident.



Figure 1. National CBR Working Group consultative arrangements



- Provide guidance on the acquisition of CBR related equipment.
- Provide guidance on the development of CBR training and exercises.
- Coordinate Commonwealth/State and Territories initiatives relating to CBR.

The working group represents the interests of a number of committees and working groups that also have interests in CBR, as shown by the diagram in Figure 1.

The working group normally meets twice per year and has focussed on the development of State and Territories CBR capabilities including CBR plans, arrangements and training. Most States and Territories now have developed state level CBR plans and CBR training is provided to emergency services personnel at Emergency Management Australia, at Mount Macedon, Victoria (Figure 2).

One of the key outcomes for the working group was the development of procedures for handling suspicious

packages in 2001. The anthrax letters in the USA was the catalyst for the rash of white powder incidents in Australia that began in mid October 2001. The procedures provided a useful basis upon which response agencies further developed their protocols. White powder incidents still occur; however, State and Territories are much better prepared, having further refined their filtering and assessment procedures in determining the most appropriate response. Clearly the PHLN played a crucial role in analysing the various powders.

Development of national coordination arrangements for CBR incidents ranks high on the working group's agenda. One major initiative to improve Australia's capacity to respond to CBR incidents is the CBR enhancement programme in which the Federal government will provide \$17.8m over four years for CBR equipment and training to the States and Territories.

The project will provide a range of personal protective clothing and detection and decontamination equipment to allow State and Territories to establish a basic capability to respond to CBR incidents. Included in this funding is equipment for use by the PHLN.

Figure 2. Emergency services CBR training at Mount Macedon.



Issues now facing the national working group include development of a working group strategy that will require endorsement from all the States and Territories and continued development of CBR training and State and Territories CBR response capabilities. As concern on the potential deliberate use of CBR increases, the relevance and importance of the national working groups work should not be understated.

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