

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **EXERCISE SIMULATES RESPONSE TO HAZARDOUS MATERIALS ATTACK**

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WESTLAKE, OH – Are local emergency forces prepared to deal with hazardous materials released during a terrorist-style attack on Northeast Ohio's critical infrastructure?

Local emergency response teams are poised to answer that question June 14, when Cuyahoga County's Local Emergency Planning Committee stages a "Hazmat Release" functional exercise at the Crown Water Treatment facility in Westlake.

"There is no way to anticipate how an accident of hazardous materials or a terrorist act will affect our citizens and surrounding environment," said Commissioner Jimmy Dimora, president of the Board of Commissioners. "But an emergency response plan in place is imperative so that damage can be contained. We hope we never have to use such a plan, but a practice exercise is a must to understand the problems and the magnitude of what might occur. Since our water supply, utilities, and infrastructure are potential targets, a plan must be prepared and ready."

The exercise, from 7 a.m. to noon on June 14, is part of the County's emergency response planning for the entire metropolitan area, will involve the Westshore Hazmat Response team, assisted by the Westlake Fire Department, and will focus on a simulated release of potentially deadly chlorine at the water treatment plant on Clague Road. Emergency response professionals from across the County will observe and critique the exercise.

"If any of our infrastructure is threatened, it is imperative that our emergency forces react in a planned, expeditious and coordinated way," said Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones. "Exercises like that on June 14th prepare our first responders to be maximally effective."

Commissioner Timothy F. Hagan agreed, noting that any attack on infrastructure, such as a water plant, would have a wide psychological impact.

"Our first responders have a critically important role in protecting us all from intentional acts aimed at causing fear and panic," said Commissioner Timothy F. Hagan. "Their reaction must be swift, coordinated, and effective, to meet any threat to the infrastructure we all depend on."

Cuyahoga County's central geographic location as a major east-west transportation route, and its many chemical and manufacturing businesses are potentially vulnerable to releases of hazardous materials due to terrorist attack.

The Local Emergency Planning Committee is a group of community leaders, industry representatives, and first responder agencies from across the County formed to develop and coordinate master plans for homeland security and emergency response.

#### **CONTACT**

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