



**NEW YORK STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
Richard F. Daines, M.D.  
Commissioner



**John R. Gibb  
Director**

February 24, 2010

Re: Regional Interoperable Communications (IOC) Drills, May 2010

Dear County Emergency Manager:

The New York State Department of Health, Office of Health Emergency Preparedness (NYSDOH - OHEP) and the New York State Emergency Management Office (NYSEMO) wish to announce and invite you to participate in the OHEP Regional Interoperable Communications drills, scheduled for the last two weeks of May, 2010.

The inaugural drills, conducted June and July of 2009, were designed by the NYSDOH – OHEP in conjunction with its regional partners including the eight (8) Regional Resource Centers (RRC) situated throughout NYS, area hospital, hospital associations and local office of emergency management. Design stressed regional flexibility and use of the communications methods and procedures common to each region. Many county Emergency Managers participated in these drills which helped to make them successful. Objectives addressed in the drills included:

- Hospital response to a NYSDOH Commerce Integrated Health Alert Notification System (IHANS) alert,
- Hospital demonstration of the ability to send and receive sustained two way voice and/or data communications with;
  - their local EOC and,
  - Tier 2 partners (another hospital)

These communications could be accomplished using cellular telephones, satellite phones, two way UHF/VHF radio, Amateur (HAM) radio, or voice over IP. Use of land line phone was not an option.

The major strengths identified during the Interoperable Communications (IOC) drills included:

- The ability to successfully conduct IOC drills that confirmed the IOC sub-capability across all regions, yet allowed for and utilized locally applicable communications methods and resources including Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) and Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES).
- The ability to successfully conduct a comprehensive IHANS phone notification drill using cell phones only.
- The ability to send and receive sustained two way communications between hospitals and between hospitals and their respective Office of Emergency Management (EOC).

The primary areas for improvement, including recommendations, are as follows:

- Increased outreach to NYSEMO and local offices of emergency management is needed to enhance participation in future IOC drills. Enhanced outreach will afford these agencies greater knowledge of IOC drills. It will also provide these agencies a greater understanding of their role in facilitating communications with health care facilities during service interruptions. Earlier inclusion in the planning process will allow for informed discussion of scheduling, the activation and deployment of amateur radio operators, and attention to full compliance with FCC regulations 97.113, 97.403, 97.407.
- As identified in the state wide hot wash, drill participation should be open to any health care facility or agency in a given region, regardless of program participation, type or federal or state affiliation.
- Greater adherence to HSEEP protocols and use of the existing Communications EEG would improve drill design. Where possible, reduction in staging of players and assets would create a “real world” atmosphere.
- An enhanced and uniform system for tracking information and data on patients and assets is should be developed and incorporated into drill design..

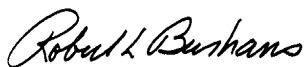
OHEP will provide a copy of the complete after action report (AAR) at your request.

OHEP will be conducting similarly designed, regionally flexible communications drills during the last two weeks of May, 2010. The drills will provide continued opportunities to demonstrate both **horizontal** (between healthcare facilities) and **vertical** (between health care facilities, local/state public safety and health agencies) communications capabilities. This year’s drills will include a more robust test of communications, as well as improvement items identified in previous drills.

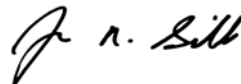
RRC and hospital representatives will be contacting your office in the near future to enlist your support and participation in these important drills. We heartily encourage your office to meet with these representatives to plan your agencies play in this exercise.

Please feel free to contact John Kushner, OHEP at [jdk02@health.state.ny.us](mailto:jdk02@health.state.ny.us) or 518-408-5163 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Burhans, Director  
Office of Health Emergency Preparedness



John R. Gibb, Director  
State Emergency Management Office

cc: County Health Department Commissioners  
Public Health Directors  
Regional Resource Center Directors  
OHEP Field Staff Representatives

