

## *Homeland Security Update...*



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### **President Announces New Biodefense Directive**

President Bush has approved a new directive -- *Biodefense for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* -- to build our ability to thwart bioterror attacks. This directive aims to integrate bioterrorism prevention and response efforts across all federal agencies to build on the significant federal biodefense initiatives instituted in the past three years.

The President's plan is focused on four objectives:

- ✓ *Threat awareness* – improving our national capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence on bioterror weapons and those who would use them;
- ✓ *Prevention and Protection* – bolstering abilities to detect and seize biological weapons and materials;
- ✓ *Surveillance and Detection* – strengthening warning and attribution mechanisms;
- ✓ *Response and Recovery* – improving ability to develop countermeasures and response plans.

Specifically, the President's plan calls for the creation of a common surveillance system to collect and analyze information about bioterror attacks. The directive also calls for the Department of Homeland Security to conduct a national risk assessment every two years on emerging biological threats and a biological "net assessment" every four years to assess the usefulness of existing countermeasures and address vulnerabilities.

In the FY2005 budget request, the Administration has prioritized a new biosurveillance initiative – a cross-cutting interagency effort to build a comprehensive detection architecture for bioterrorist attacks. This initiative coordinates previously disjointed biosurveillance of the environment, food supply, and human populations. In conjunction with this, DHS has launched BioWatch – a program that monitors the air for biological releases over major cities.

Chairman Cox considers the new directive to be a strong step forward, and that even more progress should be made quickly. Project BioShield, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives on July 16, 2003, is still languishing in the Senate. This legislation would build the national stockpile of drugs and vaccines to be used in the event of a biological attack. The Senate should act swiftly to send this vital piece of legislation to the President's desk for his signature.