

## Staten Island Terrorism Drill Leads to Real Incident

By Dr. Kerry Kelly,  
Chief Medical Officer

As part of the FDNY's continuing preparation for a potential bioterror attack, the Department held Operation BIO POD on Wednesday, October 15 in Staten Island. During the daylong exercise, all on-duty firefighters, officers and EMS personnel stationed in that borough convened for a vaccination at a single point of distribution (POD) at EMS Battalion 22. This exercise was an outgrowth of the BioTerrorism Committee guided by the Chief of Planning, Joseph Pfeiffer, and Bureau of Health Services Drs. Kerry Kelly and David Prezant.

FDNY is the first city department to run a bioterrorism exercise using a vaccination. During this drill members were offered the flu (influenza) vaccine. Although the decision to receive the inoculation was voluntary, each member had to participate so that the flow of the operation could be evaluated. Throughout the drill BHS nurses and medical officers at the POD provided medical information, reviewed consent forms and immunized members. Department of Health and OEM representatives remained at the POD site to observe the operation. Data processing at the site ensured that the activities of the day were immediately recorded – each immunization or declination was entered in real time giving supervisors an instant snapshot of the operation flow.

The flow of vaccination went well. During the peak of distribution, about 60 members were vaccinated an hour. About 50 percent of the participants actually accepted vaccination. By 4 p.m., all of the day tour had been vaccinated.

At FDNY headquarters, the Incident Management Team (IMT), under the direction of Incident Commander Chief Thomas Haring, monitored the operation. This team was activated to coordinate the logistics, staffing, supplies and the movement of members. Companies from Battalions 20, 21 and 22 were dispatched in rotation to ensure that fire suppression protection was maintained. The IMT staff during the day worked on the coordination of this movement. The evening IMT group was charged with the task of expanding this program to the remaining boroughs in a future event.

But the evening plans were cut short after a Staten Island commuter ferry crashed into a pier. In a matter of moments a routine ferry ride became a disaster scene with multiple fatalities and significant casualties. The rest of the drill was canceled as Staten Island FIRE and EMS response teams were put into action. The responding companies, under the direction of the Staten Island Borough Commander, Chief John Casey, removed victims, helped evacuate the boat and shored up the collapse region. EMS units, using mass casualty protocols, triaged, treated and transported civilian patients to

nearby hospitals. Despite 10 fatalities, many severely injured patients survived thanks to the rapid and effective intervention of our FDNY members.

Operation BIO POD was part of preparing for the unexpected. The Staten Island Ferry accident highlights the fact that the unexpected is part of our daily lives. The members of the FDNY respond every day to runs and calls for help. The response to the ferry accident was handled with the professional skills of FDNY members working in a coordinated manner with other City agencies. Should an act of bioterrorism occur, FDNY would respond in similar coordination to protect our members and our citizens.

The lessons learned from Operation BIO POD will be used to improve our FDNY strategic planning for terrorism in cooperation with other City partners. The FDNY response to calls is swift and effective whether it's putting out a fire or caring for the injured. The support services that help maintain this effective response are an important part of this coordinated effort: Fire/EMS Operations, Fire Investigation, Information and Technical Support, Health Services, Communications and Support Services were integral parts of this exercise and remain essential to the day-to-day operations of this Department. Whether dealing with a crisis at hand or planning for future threats, the FDNY is the sum of its many parts, all working together to get the job done.



**At the scene of the St. George Ferry Terminal accident in Staten Island, EMS medics and firefighters tend to the seriously injured in a triage area. Afterwards, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg is joined by (left to right) Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta, Chief of Department Frank Cruthers, NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly, MTA New York City Transit President Larry Reuter and Chief of Operations Sal Cassano.**