

## **IAEM Region 9: Successful Pandemic Flu Workshop in Northern California**

The first IAEM Region 9 Workshop on “Biological Agents and the Threat of a H5N1 Pandemic Flu” in 2007 was successfully held on May, 9 in Marysville, CA. IAEM Region 9 member and Deputy Administrator for Emergency Services Aaron Ward offered to host the event in his new Yuba County Government Center. Around 34 professionals representing a variety of fire, law enforcement, EMS, health care, public health institutions, college districts, agricultural jurisdictions, the regional Red Cross Chapter, and the California Department of Health Services participated.

The following nine counties from rather sparsely populated Northern California took part: Butte, Glenn, Colusa, Nevada, Plumas, Sierra, Sutter, Tehama, and Yuba. Also in attendance was IAEM Region 9 member Matthew Herlocker with the United Animal Nations and a representative from the office of District Assemblyman Rick Keene.

County Administrator Robert Bendorf and Aaron Ward welcomed the delegates in their opening statements. Dr. Joseph Cassady, Yuba County’s Public Health Officer, followed with an excellent overview of the current planning process and explained the challenges his county may face in case of a pandemic flu.

In the main session, presented by Gunnar J Kuepper, the participants learned more about microorganisms, particularly pathogenic bacteria and viruses, and the spread of contagious diseases. The probability and the impact of an H5N1 pandemic flu were addressed. According to a new report, more than 10 million Californians – around a quarter of the state population – will fall ill; within weeks, between 96,000 and 250,000 of them could be dead. Hospital beds and life-saving medicines will run out; businesses and transportation will shut down, depriving the populace of money, food, and their livelihoods. California will suffer economic losses exceeding US \$ 85 billion.

The workshop also discussed prevention, preparedness, and response strategies, as well as human factors in the event of a pandemic flu outbreak. The lessons passed on, were to teach citizens how to reduce the risk of spreading pathogens – even by simply emphasizing the need for handwashing – and to be proactive in regards to protective measures.

Aaron Ward said, “We are honored that IAEM leadership decided to have this workshop in Yuba County. It sends a very positive message that Region 9 also addresses the training and networking needs of rural areas. I hope that this workshop will be the first of many that Yuba County will host and that each year our attendance reflects a wider range of participants and a growing IAEM membership in the region.”

According to Region 9 President Gunnar J Kuepper, “IAEM Region 9 was very pleased to conduct the first workshop in Yuba County. In case of a pandemic outbreak, jurisdictions outside the metropolitan areas may face a significant shortage of all kind of resources. The workshop and particularly the discussion between all attendees was instrumental in facilitating a better understanding of microbiological threats, providing solutions for preparedness, response, and public education, and initiating a line of communication between the participating agencies.”

The workshop was covered in a feature article in the leading regional newspaper, the Appeal Democrat.

The next IAEM Region 9 Roundtables on “Biological Agents and the Threat of a H5N1 Pandemic Flu” are scheduled for

- May 22 - Palm Springs, CA
- May 31- Irwindale, CA (Greater Los Angeles)
- June 19 - Sacramento, CA
- June 26 - Tucson, AZ