



The Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks Newsletter

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The Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks (ICLN) is a system of interconnected federal laboratory networks that can quickly respond to high-consequence incidents and give decision makers timely, credible, and interpretable data.

NETWORK SPOTLIGHT:

CDC Presents: "This is a TEST": Using Game Theory to Train Public Health Staff on Emergency Response Planning

During the week of April 8, 2024, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Laboratory Response Network for Chemical Threats (LRN-C) held its national meeting in Jacksonville, Florida. The meeting was co-hosted by the CDC, the Association for the Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and Florida's Bureau of Public Health Laboratories. Each year at the LRN-C National Meeting, staff from CDC, LRN-C, and other preparedness partners convene to discuss operational readiness, training and outreach activities, best practices in laboratory quality management, and laboratory testing strategies for known and unknown chemical threats. At this year's LRN-C National Meeting, CDC conducted the very first LRN Radiological tabletop exercise with LRN-C laboratory professionals representing 39 state and local public health laboratories nationwide.

"This is a TEST"

"This is a TEST" is a Training and Exercise Simulation Tool (TEST) designed to encourage the development of collaborative emergency response plans amongst local preparedness partners.¹ It uses game theory and adult learning principles to increase engagement and knowledge retention. By using the TEST board game as a theoretical tabletop exercise, participants can serve various fictional responder roles following a mass radiation contamination event.



Jonathan Button, CDC's Radiation Laboratory Chief, facilitating "This is a TEST" during the LRN-C Technical Meeting. Photo: Amy Watson Hardnett.

During the April 2024 LRN-C TEST exercise, 98 participants were divided into 14 teams. Several exercise facilitators, including Andy Scott, a senior radiological/nuclear health advisor for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the ICLN Network Coordinating Group (NCG) Chairperson, were enlisted to assist players with the exercise.

Following a radiation emergency, public health

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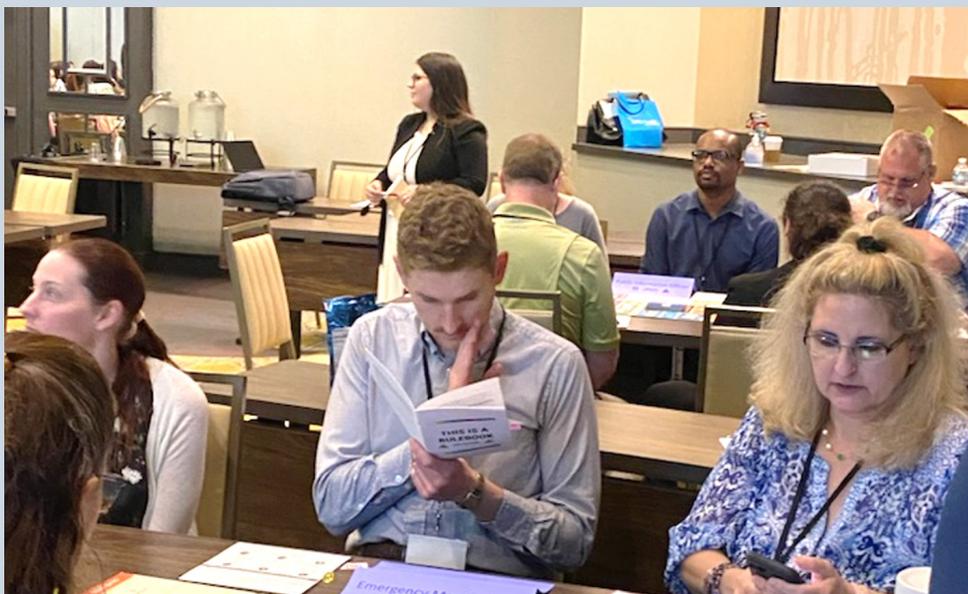
professionals will assess and monitor potentially exposed persons at community reception centers (CRCs).² At the start of the exercise, each team set up a mock Community Reception Center (CRC) to screen, decontaminate, and register individuals affected by the hypothetical radiation event. Up to seven participants per team served unique roles that supported individuals throughout the screening process. The game also included a status tracker that showed the impact of players' choices throughout each round of the exercise. The exercise was concluded after each team completed five rounds of the game.

"The overall theme of the meeting was outreach and featured amazing presentations of the work being done at the state and local level to improve collaboration and communication," said Jonathan Button, CDC's Radiation Laboratory Chief. "I was excited for the opportunity to share this novel and engaging outreach tool."

As the exercise proceeded, more and more real-world problems were injected into the game that required deliberation and cooperation amongst participants representing various preparedness roles. Per the status trackers, participants had to decide whether to deplete funding and other assets to resolve the increasing issues such as staff fatigue and public anxiety. Thus, each round of the game teaches participants valuable lessons regarding response capacity, resource allocation and response coordination amongst preparedness partners.

"The game is a great way to get players to think about the challenges of running a Community Reception Center in the aftermath of a radiological incident, as well as a model for how we might leverage a 'play to learn' model," said Andy Scott. "Let the fun begin!"

"Playing 'This is a TEST' was a fun interactive experience that allowed us to learn all the facets involved in the event of a radiation contamination," said Michelle Latona, LRN-C Scientist from the Florida Department of Health. "By assuming key roles, we gained insight as to what it takes to get people checked through various required steps. The game cards provided unexpected events that compelled us to work together as a team so that resources were used efficiently. Our group enjoyed the critical thinking and strategy aspects that allowed us to save all the people."



Michael Kuehne, LRN-C scientist from the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, and Michelle Latona, LRN-C scientist from the Florida Department of Health, engaging in the "This is a TEST."

Photo: Amy Watson Hardnett

Summary

The 2024 LRN-C TEST exercise inspired a great deal of lively and thought-provoking discussions around chemical threat preparedness and response decision-making. Using "This is a TEST" as an interactive tabletop exercise was a particularly innovative way of increasing LRN-C preparedness capabilities. This was the first time the CDC was able to convene more than 35 LRN-C laboratories for an "in-person" exercise at one time. The 2024 LRN-C tabletop exercise was a powerful learning tool for LRN-C staff to identify potential gaps in emergency operations during a mass casualty event.

For information on obtaining "This Is a TEST" training resources in your jurisdiction, please refer to the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/readiness/php/testgame/index.html>.

References:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/radiation-emergencies/php/crcctest/>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/radiation-emergencies/infographic/community-reception-center.html>

Fourth Generation Agent Tabletop Exercise

The ICLN is in the process of planning a tabletop exercise (TTX) utilizing a now unclassified Fourth Generation Agent (FGA). The execution of this exercise is anticipated for February 2025.

The exercise centers on a notional, intentional contamination of cargo facilities located at the Memphis airport. The contamination is envisioned to spread throughout the associated cargo infrastructure and then be carried offsite, including internationally, via packing materials and staff. In the scenario, both sickened people and environmental surfaces require sampling.

Current laboratory participants include the DoD Laboratory Network, U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Chemical Biological Center (DEVCOM CBC), Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF), Civil Support Teams (CST), the CDC Emergency Response Branch/Chemical Threat Lab, and EPA's Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN). This exercise will also bring together many other federal players including DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction, FBI Regional officers, DHS's FBI Liaison Officer (LNO), along with commercial entities that could be impacted.

Stand by for further updates on the lessons-learned and outcomes associated with this exercise!

Two types of goals will be addressed with this exercise:

- Standard goals are the same for each ICLN exercise and include working through the ICLN Standard Operating Procedure for creating an incident on the ICLN Portal, sending out Situation Reports, organizing and participating in exercise-specific virtual meetings on Zoom.gov, tracking lessons-learned, and uploading laboratory data results to the ICLN Portal's Data Exchange Utility.
- Exercise-Specific goals are based on the scenario and agent of concern. The specific goals for this exercise include:
 - Define the people and positions that need to be "in the room" (from each network/agency/organization) for responding to this incident.
 - Create a database of labs that can analyze for FGAs including analytical throughput in samples/week (including method information with target analytes defined).
 - Define sample transport and handling issues.
 - Determine how to best sample/analyze the packages and impacted areas.
 - Understand constraints imposed on labs due to worker safety and waste management concerns.
 - Provide a process on how to communicate about samples (and analysis) related to sensitive/potentially CUI/classified information sharing control and distribution.

