

**CHITTENDEN COUNTY, VERMONT**  
**LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE #1**  
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## Meeting notes – November 13, 2018

Present: Marshall Distel, CCRPC; Mark Emmons, FBI; Jeff Rogers and Lee Diamond, UVM Risk Management; Bob Henneberger, AARP/Red Cross; Josh Estey, CSWD; Madeline Hughes, Shelburne News; Aaron Noble and Bob Lake, Shelburne Police Department; Patrick McKee, Wake Robin; Mary Thomson, Milton; Lee Krohn, Shelburne; Terry Francis, South Burlington Fire Department.

Marshall Distel called the meeting to order at 0910. The 11/13 LEPC 1 meeting took place at the Shelburne Town Offices. There were no changes to the agenda, nor public comment on items not on the agenda. Introductions were made.

Marshall introduced FBI Special Agent Mark Emmons. This LEPC 1 meeting was meant to serve as a recap of the 2017 Wake Robin ricin incident. Agent Emmons prepared a presentation that outlined the incident and how emergency responders worked together in a coordinated effort to address the situation. The presentation began with an overview of the FBI and the local field offices. While Vermont does not have its own FBI field office, the State is served by the Albany Division of the FBI. Agent Emmons is assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force. The FBI is the lead investigative agency in incidents involving terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Agent Emmons provided an overview of WMDs as well as the WMD threat spectrum.

The presentation then moved on to a discussion regarding ricin, which is a select agent processed from castor beans that is highly toxic and has no known antidote. Upon ingesting this select agent, symptoms would arise within 24 hours, with respiratory distress, fever, as well as a cough. Castor beans were grown at Wake Robin as a decorative plant. If it is not known that ricin was ingested, it is unlikely that a physician would be able to recognize this since exposure is very rare.

Agent Emmons then showed a training video that was produced by the FBI that highlighted how a potential WMD incident should be handled by emergency responders.

After the training video was shown, Agent Emmons moved on to discuss the ricin incident at Wake Robin. The subject at the center of the incident was 70-year-old resident Betty Miller. She had a history of depression and self-harm, but was well-liked and sociable within the Wake Robin retirement community. On 11/27, Miller informed a psychiatrist of her suicidal thoughts and that she had processed ricin. She was then self-admitted to UVM Medical Center. Subsequently, the psychiatrist called the Wake Robin medical director. Shelburne Police Department was then notified and ensured that Miller's Wake Robin apartment was secured. The Shelburne Fire Department, Vermont HAZMAT and the Vermont State Police were deployed to the scene, as well as the FBI WMD coordinator. HAZMAT and the Vermont National Guard Civil Support Team made a positive field test for ricin, after finding it in Miller's kitchen cupboard in vials labeled "ricin."

Following the positive identification of ricin, a Threat Creditability Evaluation (TCE) was scheduled. Agent Emmons gathered a large group of stakeholders to assess the credibility of the WMD threat and to determine the likelihood that the threat will result in loss of life and threat to property. The FBI provided timely guidance and a plan of action. The post-TCE plan of action involved the following: ensuring public safety (secure residence, secure car, victim interviews), interviewing Miller, searching residence, coordinating with the U.S. Attorney's office and a confirmation of the ricin test.

In the initial VT State Police interview of Miller, she was very cooperative and admitted to ingesting her own ricin, for which she was hospitalized with "pneumonia." (as physicians were unaware of what she had ingested). Miller was ultimately charged with having an unregistered possession of a select agent (ricin). She pled guilty and was sentenced to time served for 9 months, 5 months of probation and a significant fine. She is currently receiving mental health treatment in Maine.

After the presentation, a discussion followed with regards to lessons learned from the incident. Patrick McKee of Wake Robin suggested that communication between high-level FBI officials and local emergency responders could have been better. However, he said that communication between local FBI officials, like Agent Emmons, was excellent. McKee also highlighted how Chris Bell from the Vermont Department of Health went above and beyond to ensure that effective communication was preserved. Following the incident, Wake Robin removed all the decorative castor bean plants and now maintains a specific protocol to deal with potential incidents in the future.

LEPC 1 then discussed how to effectively maintain coordination and communication during an emergency event. Finding a single point of contact is essential to ensure that mixed messages are avoided.

Project updates were shared.

Bob Henneberger told the group that Matt Ward, the local Disaster Program Manager for the Red Cross, has been deployed to California to assist with the wildfire relief efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 1030.

The next LEPC meeting will be held on December 11 at the CCRPC Offices in Winooski.

*Respectfully submitted by Marshall Distel*

Please note: LEPC meeting agendas, minutes, and other information may also be found at <http://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/committees/local-emergency-planning-committee/>