

**National Public Health Leadership Development Network
Balderson Leadership Project Award
RUNNER-UP
Ohio Public Health Leadership Institute**

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**School Nurse Bioterrorism/Disaster Preparedness: An Assessment of
Competency and Training Need**

In the past, disaster planning in schools centered around preparing for natural disasters. The eruption of school violence and increasing prevalence of terrorism have led to the recognition of the need for schools to be prepared for multiple hazards. Schools have an obligation to care for students and staff in the event of an emergency or disaster.

A competent work force is essential to meet the complex needs of a school system and all its members in times of disaster. School nurses are in a position to be a key contributor in the overall planning for disaster preparedness. Each nurse's professional background and employment setting determine the extent of their involvement in disaster planning.

Recognizing this need, and the timeliness of the issue, an eight member leadership team was assembled bringing together public health nursing staff, university faculty with expertise in school nurse education and disaster preparedness, and school nurse representatives from a three county area of Northeastern Ohio. The goal of the team was to determine the bioterrorism / disaster preparedness needs of school nurses in a

three county area of northeastern Ohio, and how to best meet those needs. Specific project objectives included:

1. Evaluate the disaster preparedness body of knowledge in relation to school nurse needs.
2. Assess the learning needs of local (tri-county) school nurses in the area of bioterrorism / disaster preparedness and emergency response.
3. Determine best venues to meet the learning needs of school nurses in the tri-county area.

The team developed a five page, 85 item survey, modeled after an instrument from the Center for Public Health Preparedness- Ohio's Health Commissioner survey, with content derived from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Bioterrorism & Emergency Readiness Competencies for all Public Health Workers* and National Association of School Nurses' *Disaster Preparedness Guidelines for School Nurses* publications. Surveys (n=125) were mailed to all school nurses in public and private k-12 schools in the tri-county area in May 2004.

Eighty surveys were completed and returned, yielding a 64% response rate. School nurses overwhelmingly indicated a low confidence level in their disaster preparedness capabilities and high need for further training. (Specific findings are beyond the limits of this abstract.) Leadership team members are currently responding to the survey findings; determining dissemination methods to public health and education leaders in local and state venues; and planning bioterrorism/disaster preparedness educational training for school nurses in the 2004-05 school year based on the survey. Reaching the conclusion of the State Leadership Institute's formal program, the team members have committed to continue to work on this next phase of the project, and attempt to meet the identified needs, thus strengthening the community's ability to be prepared to respond to bioterrorism / disaster.