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Execs want businesses on alert for disaster

Rapid-response force would assist the state

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BY JOSEPH R. PERONE
Star-Ledger Staff

Brian Dunlap says the state of New Jersey needs a lesson in arithmetic.

About 40,000 health-care workers would be needed to vaccinate people here during a bioterrorism attack, he says. The state has fewer than 3,000.

"You do the math," says the former vice president of marketing for Lucent Technologies.

Now, Dunlap and a group of New Jersey's top business executives are banding together in a corporate militia of sorts to hash out the logistics of dealing with an act of terrorism. The BENS New Jersey Business Force is designed to be a rapid deployment force that will muster the resources of companies big and small to aid New Jersey officials during a statewide catastrophe.

BENS stands for Business Executives for National Security, a 20-year-old group of pro-defense executives based in Washington, D.C. The New Jersey group, though, is the first state unit and is being watched as a blueprint for the rest of the nation.

If it works, it could lead to greater coordination with the federal government and a stronger role for states in security efforts.

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"I think of it as shopkeepers bearing arms against the enemy after Paul Revere rides through town," said retired Air Force Gen. Charles Boyd, who is president of BENS. "If you make this thing work in New Jersey, it will be a template for the rest of the country."

New Jersey is a natural place to start. It is the most densely populated state in the United States, with a corporate community that few places can match.

It also has plenty of targets: Newark Liberty International Airport, the nation's second-busiest container port, two nuclear power plants, Interstate 95, rail lines, chemical plants and oil storage terminals.

Executives behind the business force include Josh Weston, honorary chairman of Automatic Data Processing; Albert Gamper, chief executive of CIT Group; and businessman and philanthropist Ray Chambers.

Other charter members include Verizon Communications, Pfizer, Prudential Financial, KPMG, United Retail Group, DRS Technologies, Stevens Institute of Technology, Amelior Foundation, Saint Barnabas Health Care System and Atlantic Health System.

Gov. James E. McGreevey said last week the group is working with the state Department of Health and Senior Services, State Police, Office of Emergency Management and the Attorney General's Office.

"We understand in a post-9/11 world not only the importance of responding with greater efficacy, but also the importance of working collaboratively with the private sector in our efforts to battle terrorism," McGreevey said last Tuesday during a dinner in Jersey City to launch the business program. "The business force has the full, unequivocal support of the entirety of this administration."

The business force is recruiting companies to provide money and volunteer workers, equipment and resources.

"The idea is to have a true partnership for homeland security that involves the state and the private sector," said Dunlap, executive director of the business force. "The state doesn't have the resources to do everything."

The business force's three main objectives are:

- A business response network on the Internet (www.njbusinessforce.org). The system would tell volunteers where to go and alert emergency personnel where to find equipment, supplies and facilities.

Skilled volunteers such as carpenters, nurses and electricians could preregister on the Web site so they could be contacted quickly during a crisis.

- A program to train business volunteers how to collect health-care data and perform damage assessment or first-aid. The state Health Department and Office of Emergency Management would train volunteers periodically, and some corporations also could assist with training sessions for specific skills.
- A distribution system to hand out medicine. State agencies, the National Guard and businesses would coordinate transporting and repackaging bulk medical supplies for fast distribution to health-care sites. Trucking and package express companies could designate certain vehicles and drivers to pick up supplies, and fast-food restaurants could use their drive-through systems to hand out vaccines.

"Pre-organization is critical because you need a push-button response," said Josh Weston, former chief executive of ADP. "We could tell people on the radio what type of skills might be needed and tell volunteers to look on the Web site to find out where to go."

That will require a system that can withstand both a physical disaster and an electronic attack, according to Max Staples of SecureWorks, an Atlanta Internet security firm.

"There is a strong belief that the next physical attack could include a cyber-attack as well," said Staples, who is director of sales engineering.

Government officials are still trying to figure out which group was behind the "Slammer" worm that paralyzed 200,000 business computers last January. Although it did not carry a virus, executives fear it could have been a test by an extremist group to prepare for a larger attack, Staples said.

"If I'm the enemy, I'm going to try to break into that (computer) server and attack a trucking yard or the trucks," he said.

Training for any business volunteers will have to involve more than distributing drug packs or patching up cuts and bruises, said Simon Moore, associate professor of information design and corporate communications at Bentley College in Waltham, Mass.

"The problem is that they will be dealing with angry, scared victims," he said. "If they are going to do this right, they are going to have to go through crisis rehearsals."

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