

**ENSURING PREPAREDNESS AGAINST THE FLU VIRUS
AT SCHOOL AND AT WORK**

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

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Good morning. On behalf of ORC Worldwide, I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to discuss some of the steps businesses are taking to ensure that workers are protected from Influenza A (H1N1).

Over the past few days, there appears to be a growing consensus among the experts that this new virus is, at least for now, a less serious threat than originally feared 13 days ago. But the story could have been very different and there are a number of important lessons that can be learned from our observations of the actions taken by businesses as the situation rapidly evolved.

Lesson #1: Advance Planning Counts!

ORC Worldwide conducted teleconferences on April 28 and May 5 for our Networks membership of several hundred multinational companies from diverse industry sectors to share critical information on strategies for responding to the H1N1 outbreak. On May 1, ORC sent a survey questionnaire to the health, safety and human resources functions of more than 600 ORC client companies, regarding aspects of their companies' preparedness and response activities. We have learned useful information from these teleconferences and from the 89 companies that have responded to our survey.

- An overwhelming majority of those responding to the survey have a business continuity plan or pandemic preparedness plan in place to respond to global outbreaks of flu or a full-blown flu pandemic.
- Over 60% of the companies responding implemented changes to business travel practices as a result of the outbreak.
- Communication to employees in the form of health briefings and dissemination of contact numbers for medical advice is reported by the majority of respondents.
- Almost half of those responding had instituted policies requiring that employees returning from areas with confirmed cases of H1N1 stay at home for a period of time before returning to work.
- Existing plans were geared to "worst case scenarios" and plans had to be adjusted as new information about the severity and scope of the H1N1 outbreak became available.
- Communication and coordination across functions has been a challenge in some companies. Preparedness planning must include regular communication across critical functions such as health and safety, human resources, security, legal and others and must be established well before a crisis occurs.

Companies tell us that planning initiated in response to the threats of SARS and avian flu and refined over time has proven to be practical and useful in the situation we find ourselves in today. Effective plans contain feedback loops allowing for evaluation of their effectiveness and mid-course corrections. Plans must be scalable, flexible, and adaptable to rapidly changing conditions.

Lesson #2: Timely and Consistent Government Information and Guidance is Critical to Effective Response!

Clear and timely government information--at the federal, state and local level--has proven to be critical to company efforts to respond effectively to the outbreak. Frequently updated information and guidance from the CDC has been invaluable. Preparedness planning activities related to avian flu and bioterrorism by state and county and local health departments in California provide a particularly compelling example of how public/private partnerships and outreach to the business community, have helped inform the business response.

OSHA's outreach to the business community this week was also welcome. Particularly heartening is the commitment by OSHA, NIOSH, the CDC and other agencies to coordinate their response activities and eliminate inconsistencies in messages.

"On the ground" coordination is necessary in many more jurisdictions. This is a two-way street and both business and government entities at all levels need to look for new ways to effectively connect and collaborate on public health preparedness issues. Efforts to use novel ways to deliver critical public health information to a vast and diverse audience must continue. CDC's use of Twitter is a great example of this.

Lesson #3: Making Pandemic Flu Planning Part of an Overall Safety and Health Management System Optimizes Protection of Workers and Helps to Ensure Business Continuity!

A basic foundation for effective worker protection is the establishment of a comprehensive system for managing safety and health performance, focusing on elimination of injuries and illnesses through a continuous process of identifying, assessing and reducing risks. Companies with such systems in place, and with the active engagement of senior leadership, are in the best position to effectively engage in preparedness planning, keep plans up to date, and take decisive action in response to public health emergencies such as the current H1N1 outbreak.

ORC looks forward to working with the Committee as it continues to evaluate the key components of effective programs and policies to ensure worker protection.