



Overview

BioWatch is the only federally-managed, locally-operated, nationwide bio-surveillance system designed to detect the intentional release of select aerosolized biological agents. The program operates in more than 30 high threat metropolitan areas across the country and is utilized to support National Special Security Events like the Super Bowl, national party conventions, and the Presidential Inauguration.

The program protects millions of people by focusing on early detection of a biological attack. Early detection is critical to the successful treatment of affected populations and provides public health decision makers more time – and thereby more options – in responding to, mitigating, and recovering from a bioterrorist event. If a bioagent is detected rapidly, prophylactic treatment can follow more quickly to prevent casualties. BioWatch may also help provide forensic evidence on the source and nature of such an attack, which is critical to law enforcement investigations.

BioWatch is a component within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Affairs' Weapons of Mass Destruction and Biodefense Office. The program is operated by a team comprised of field operators, laboratory technicians, and public health officials from city, county, State, and Federal organizations. This coordinated team is responsible for installing bio-collectors, collecting daily samples, analyzing and reporting laboratory results, and responding to the detection of a positive signal, known as a BioWatch Actionable Result (BAR).

Partnership in Preparedness

The BioWatch has initiated and developed collaborative relationships with State and local public health, laboratory, law enforcement, and environmental health agencies, strengthening our Nation's overall biodefense preparedness.

A number of key partners play pivotal roles to ensure the program's success, including:

- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which provides funding and management for the program
- City, county, and State governments, who locally own and operate BioWatch
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which oversees the Laboratory Response Network where collected samples are analyzed, acts as a liaison with State and local public health departments
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which performs or assists in sampling activities in response to a BAR
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which provides threat assessments and is the lead law enforcement and investigative agency
- The National Laboratories, which provide technical support, including the development and assessment of new technologies and protocols

Future Goals

Improvements to existing technologies, processes, and relationships will continue to be important factors as the BioWatch program evolves. Future goals include:

- Enhancing detection coverage by adding more outdoor and indoor collectors to established and new BioWatch jurisdictions
- Improving current collection technologies and methods for more rapid detection and greater cost efficiencies
- Maximizing coordination and collaboration with other detection programs
- Improving tools to identify released biological agents to support response operations