

Guidelines for Hand-held tests for Anthrax
Oregon Department of Human Services - October 24, 2001

Hand-held assays are sold commercially for the rapid detection of *Bacillus anthracis*, the bacterial agent of anthrax. Both federal and Oregon public health agencies question the efficacy of these hand-held “field tests” for anthrax.

The evaluation of whether an environmental sample suspected of anthrax should be forwarded to a laboratory for microbiological testing should be based on a thorough threat assessment rather than solely on the results of a hand-held test, whether positive or negative. This initial assessment should follow the guidelines set forth by the Oregon State Police. A copy of the guidelines can be read at: <http://www.oshd.org/acd/bioterr/ospmail.pdf>

In a recent Health Advisory, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cautions that scientific data on the efficacy of hand-held assays for *B. anthracis* are unavailable. These assays may lack the sensitivity and specificity to provide useful information in many cases. They may yield both false-positive and false-negative results. At least two false-positive result in the field has already occurred in Oregon. The CDC advisory may read at:

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/DocumentsApp/Anthrax/10182001HealthAlertPM/10182001HealthAlertPM.asp>

Communication about a possible anthrax incident with the media or general public should never be based solely on the results of a hand-held assay. Preliminary or final results regarding anthrax contamination or infection should only be provided by state or local public health officials, based on microbiological testing performed at the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory or CDC.

Communication about a possible anthrax incident or investigation should take place within authorized channels, and only on a “need to know” basis.