

Development of a Competency Based Training Program for Emergency Animal Disease Response Personnel

King, C.B.¹, Mackereth, G.F.¹, Towler, M.², Richardson, B.³, Peterson, T.³, and Mitchell, D.³

¹Biosecurity New Zealand; ²Agriquality Ltd; ³The Integral Group Ltd

Abstract

A country's ability to deploy an initial complement of competent personnel in the event of emergency animal disease outbreak and subsequent scale-up in the face of a large outbreak defines the central objective of its emergency animal disease response training program. Biosecurity New Zealand is enhancing its ability to meet this objective by developing a training program that enables recognition of learning through the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications.

This paper summarises the findings of the training requirements analysis and presents the training strategy developed to meet these requirements. This strategy requires comprehensive integration of emergency animal disease response processes and procedures, system tools, training, and assessment. The challenges and benefits of implementing this training strategy are discussed.

The authors conclude that the implementation of comprehensive competency based training will significantly enhance New Zealand's ability to respond to emergency animal disease outbreaks.

Introduction

The 2001 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom highlighted the large number of personnel that may be required to manage an emergency animal disease outbreak and the importance of training systems to support the deployment of competent personnel to the outbreak. New Zealand has responded to these issues by developing a new competency based training system for emergency animal disease response. A project to develop the new training system was initiated in April 2004, and implementation is scheduled for July 2006.

Training system objectives include enhancement of Biosecurity New Zealand's ability to; source and train response personnel as and when required, up skill response personnel on a regular basis using refresher training, provide response personnel with access to an emergency animal disease response knowledge base, and train additional response personnel in the face of an outbreak. Achievement of these objectives will enable more effective and efficient responses to disease outbreaks.

Analysis of the training requirements determined that a role based integrated approach to training would be the most effective strategy to adopt. This paper describes the key components of a role based integrated approach and the challenges and benefits of implementing this approach.

Training Strategy

The training strategy requires integration of process and procedures, with competency (unit) standards and assessment, and training. Processes and procedures define many of the competencies required of the role holders. Non-process competencies required by each role, such as management and communication, were also identified and included in the unit standards. Assessment materials facilitate evaluation of whether a candidate has met the performance criteria specified in the unit standards, and the delivery of training to candidates provides them with the knowledge and skills required to meet these performance criteria.

Ongoing implementation of the training strategy requires effective content management and supporting training system infrastructure. A web compatible knowledge base provides centralised content management for all training program materials including process and procedures, unit standards, assessment materials and training materials. Supporting training system infrastructure includes competent training facilitators, assessors, and a national moderation system.

The competency framework provides Biosecurity New Zealand with certainty of the competence of certified personnel involved in an emergency animal disease response. Credible reporting of role-holder competence is dependant upon effective integration of four critical quality assurance components; clear agreed statements of ability (unit standards), quality of training and assessment providers, consistency of assessment processes and decisions, and controlled certification of ability. Biosecurity New Zealand has elected to register its competency framework with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to provide ongoing external quality assurance for the competency framework and to recognise role-holder achievement by awarding nationally recognised qualifications.

Training delivery is centred on the use of realistic outbreak scenarios to illustrate effective operation of the procedures relevant to each role. Training materials are organised into generic modules applicable to multiple roles and specific modules applicable to one role. This reduces the cost of training development and facilitates scalability. Induction training is primarily classroom-based and facilitator led. Refresher training is based around live exercises and simulations.

Training Strategy Benefits and Challenges

Role based integrated approaches to training ensure that the; training provided is meaningful to the role, roles are trained in a logical sequence, role holders understand where they fit in the response life-cycle, training includes procedures, and enables outcomes of learning to be achieved, as well as providing a scalable training system.

Development of training materials to support the training strategy required that business processes are documented, improved and signed off, and that the development of unit standards and training materials were treated as a natural outflow. Quality process, procedures, unit standards assessment and training materials requires that the development process includes separate capture, documentation, review, and sign-off steps. The substantial time investment required from subject matter experts, information developers, unit standard writers and training developers ensures that the materials developed are relevant to the roles, and that there is significant buy-in and commitment by personnel to use and enhance materials to reflect the best knowledge available.

The introduction of a competency framework into the emergency animal disease response training represents a significant change for personnel and emergency animal disease program managers. Personnel that previously have been deemed to be competent based upon attending a training course, or many years of participation in simulations and disease outbreaks now have to submit to a formal assessment process. Existing personnel may be confused as to why they have to submit to an assessment process, and may feel threatened by it. Furthermore, assessment requires candidates to take personal responsibility for preparing their portfolio to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. This requires significantly more discipline than merely attending a scheduled course or simulation.

The effort required to prepare for assessment is a key aspect of the adult learning. However, the time candidates spend practicing and embedding the knowledge is several-fold more than the time required to attend the course. This can create a dilemma for emergency animal disease program managers that want to ensure that a competent workforce is available for disease outbreaks, but

would prefer not commit to finding the extra resources required to fund the additional hours of candidate effort, or to make the difficult choice to have a more highly skilled yet smaller pool of trained personnel to draw from.

Biosecurity New Zealand is addressing these issues by; ensuring that the benefits of the new training strategy are clearly understood by all involved, by including experienced emergency animal disease response personnel in the development of competency framework, making the assessment process simple and pleasant, and ensuring that candidates have access to coaching and mentoring support. The culture supporting assessment needs to be one that sets candidates up to succeed. That is, assessment practices should be fair and transparent, candidates selected for training should have the base skills and attributes required to succeed, and the training delivered should enable candidates to achieve the performance criteria required.

Conclusion

New Zealand's ability to manage disease outbreaks is expected to be significantly enhanced through the implementation of a role based integrated approach to emergency animal disease response training. The enhanced capability will be achieved through the development of more effective processes and procedures and through enhancing the trained pool of response role-holders with verifiable evidence of ability.