



News Release

For Information: Don Kennedy, 410-436-7118

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U.S Army preps for remediation mission in Melbourne, Australia

ECBC partners with the Kirk Health Clinic to ensure safety of deployed personnel

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – The U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center has partnered with the Kirk U.S. Army Health Clinic to prepare personnel traveling to Melbourne, Australia with safety measures that ensure optimal onsite working performance and environmental conditions halfway around the world. ECBC's Chemical Biological Application and Risk Reduction (CBARR) Business Unit completed safety training and medical testing prior to an upcoming remediation effort for the Australia Department of Defence (ADoD).

“Each site that they go to, whether it is Australia, Albania or Washington, D.C., is a little bit different so sometimes there are special procedures for a particular operation,” said Lauren Abbott, a certified Physician Assistant at the Kirk U.S. Army Health Clinic. “With this particular operation in Melbourne, they are doing some work that requires scaffolding because the height of the rooms is so tall.”

Abbott traveled to the Melbourne operation site in September with about 20 other CBARR personnel who will be supporting the ADoD during an upcoming remediation mission. For two weeks, pre-operational set up and mock exercises were conducted by personnel who ran through several staged scenarios, including what would happen if someone had an emergency while on the scaffolding.

“What if somebody was exposed to some-thing? Had chest pain or a heart attack? How would you get them down? We were able to run through that procedure several times and stage multiple scenarios. Safety is definitely one of the first things CBARR looks at in every type of operation,” Abbott said.

Heat stress is likely to be the No. 1 safety issue posing a threat to workers who are encapsulated in personal protective equipment (PPE) for hours at a time. Abbott estimated that the average worker would be able to work effectively for four or five hours on a day when it is 44 degrees outside. However, once temperatures climb closer to 100 degrees as in Australia, the time to be able to work safely becomes significantly less. CBARR does have a heat stress plan that incorporates a work/rest cycle that compares the outside, or ambient temperatures, with humidity levels to determine how long a person can work before needing to rest.

“Essentially, the biggest thing is going to be heat stress. If they are physically fatigued, maybe they didn’t get enough sleep or are dehydrated, that can really put stress on the body. With additional respiratory equipment and physical protection gear, it can really get you tired pretty quickly. The key is to stay well-rested and drink plenty of fluids.”

Physical fitness also plays a role in how well a person can perform given tasks in challenging environments where heat stress is likely. Prior to traveling, personnel must pass a “step test” that requires stepping on a 10-inch step stool at a moderate pace for three-minute intervals. During the rest period, healthcare personnel like Abbott check their heart rates. Once cleared, this monitoring effort is replicated in the field where employees are required to wear heart rate monitors.

“That’s one of the things that ECBC and CBARR use to monitor their employees for heat stress. While they’re actually doing the operation, the workforce wears heart rate monitors so every 15-30 minutes an onsite safety officer can conduct a check to record heart rates. They can then determine if a person is getting fatigued or dehydrated and may need to sit for a few minutes or be pulled from the operation,” Abbott said.

About 40 CBARR personnel will support the overseas effort, but must first be medically cleared with the appropriate vaccinations like Tetanus, which will protect against infection from cuts or punctures from sharp metal objects. Hepatitis A and B vaccinations must be up-to-date to prevent illness in case of exposure to blood-borne pathogens while working with pipes for waste disposal.

According to Abbott, different countries require different vaccinations prior to entry and the destination may determine the kinds of bacterial diseases or viruses that are present in a given location. Fortunately, the Melbourne cityscape does not pose any particular threats, she said. Abbott has also coordinated healthcare efforts with the ADoD, and onsite medical teams will be available to treat work-related injuries in the event of an emergency. Additionally, local urgent care centers are available to workers who experience sinusitis cold-related symptoms or other acute illnesses.

CBARR’s unique ability to be deployed at anytime, anywhere is made possible through the exceptional medical and chemical surveillance measures implemented by the organization to ensure the safety of its workforce and customers both home and abroad.

For more information about ECBC, visit <http://www.ecbc.army.mil/>.

ECBC is the Army’s principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. ECBC has achieved major technological advances for the warfighter and for our national defense, with a long and distinguished history of providing the Armed Forces with quality systems and outstanding customer service. ECBC is a U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command laboratory located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. For more information about the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, please visit our website at <http://www.ecbc.army.mil/> or call (410) 436-7118.

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