

**Moderator:** *Many people in our research talked about the quality and availability of information for them to do their jobs and networks that would get information out to them. And they had both positive and negative things to say about them. People told us that information is an asset that needs a lot more attention and investment. Peter, what do you see as happening in the area of public health information?*

**Peter Levin:** Well, the New York State Department of Health has a series of networks that enable hospitals to communicate with the department. County health departments can communicate over a special secure Health Alert Network. The idea is to be able to know what's going on; where there are hospital beds, what the blood supply is. These are the kinds of networks that are used regularly already.

This has reached a fairly sophisticated level and there are even health departments in their own networks in New York State that are near one another where they can quickly give information about communicable diseases and so on. I think all of this will go forward. And I gather, since the Internet seems to have stayed up during 9/11, that it has more redundancy built into it than I imagined.

I'm always very leery of these networks because unless the hospital personnel are using them all the time, they won't be effective when the red light goes off. It's always going to happen at the wrong time of the day or night, and the person who knows how to do it isn't going to be there. Clearly you've got to have these information systems with people using them all the time and being familiar with them for them to work in a time of crisis.

**Larry Knafo:** This is one area I think we've actually made huge improvements. I would have to separate information networks into those that help us support our day-to-day operations and those that are information networks with the public. We've actually made some improvements in both of these areas.

One of the things that's happened after September 11th is that there has been a move to get together between the state, local and municipal governments and start sharing data. The upcoming Republican National Convention has been a great catalyst to help us talk with the state and federal government about security around Madison Square Garden and the whole area of the Convention. And we've been working with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority on building subway maps and really starting to share data.

The other end of this that I think is even more important is the communications networks that we have with the public. This is where we've made the most improvement. The implementation of 3-1-1 (information telephone hotline) provides us with an immediate mechanism to get information out to the public. That, combined with our Web site and the media, is obviously the biggest source of information. There are many little webs connected: 3-1-1 connects to the Emergency Management Office, the Emergency Management Office connects to all of the hospitals in the city, and to all of the agencies. By bringing all these groups together, we have the ability to move information around in a very efficient manner.

We tested this network during the Staten Island ferry crash. It was our most significant incident since September 11th where we had missing people. We had people being brought to hospitals and there was no tracking mechanism in place. We created a family assistance center for the second time since September 11th, and we were able to get somebody to the scene, relay information back to OEM through the 3-1-1 to the public, and share the information with the police department. The public really benefited from that; we handled a lot of calls.

**Steve Kos:** What Larry said about New York City is very true. We connect to their Web sites—we get information from the New York City Office of Emergency Management every day. New York City has done good job. In the case of New York State Office of Emergency Management, we are getting some very good information flow going back and forth there. But it's still piecemeal. The quality of information depends on where you reside in the private sector and who on the public side you're dealing with.