



PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERT STATEMENT ON MAJOR GAP IN CHEMICAL TERRORISM PREPAREDNESS DESPITE PRESIDENT BUSH'S WARNING OF POSSIBLE ATTACKS

Media contacts: Laura Segal (202) 223-9870 x 278 or lsegal@tfah.org or Michael Earls (202) 223-9870 x 273 or mearls@tfah.org

Washington, DC, September 12, 2003 – The following is a statement from Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director, Trust for America's Health in response to the warning issued by President Bush yesterday to the chemical industry that terrorists may be planning potential chemical attacks:

“This is the latest in a series of warnings by homeland security and other officials that a chemical terrorist attack in the U.S. is a real possibility. Unfortunately, a report issued in June this year by Trust for America's Health (TFAH) found that state public health laboratories – a crucial component of our defense and response system – are dangerously unprepared to meet this challenge.

“Public health labs are responsible for identifying the chemical weapon used in an assault, which then drives the critical treatment, containment, and clean-up decisions. The reality is that nearly two-years after being overwhelmed during the anthrax attacks, labs still haven't received the real investment needed to fix many of their deficiencies. These are not theoretical problems. Taking action toward better preparedness is key to saving lives.

“Trust for America's Health recommends a serious modernization effort aimed at making our nation's public health laboratories state-of-the-art for the 21st Century. This would require upgrading communications, staffing, equipment and facilities, and making a real commitment to increase and stabilize support at both the state and federal levels.”

-30-

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. www.healthyamericans.org.