

Discussing the issues



Congressman Jerry Moran listened to questions and comments from area citizens in a town-hall meeting this morning at the Western State Bank. There were 71 people in the room as Moran addressed local concerns about national issues. Photo by Michelle L. Hawkins/The Goodland Daily News.

Government adapting monitors

By LAURA MECKLER

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The government is adapting environmental monitors scattered across the nation to detect bioterrorism, hoping they will provide early warning if smallpox, anthrax or other deadly germs are released into the air.

The system would retrofit many of the 3,000 existing environmental monitoring stations with new filters to detect biological agents, an administration official said Tuesday.

It wasn't clear when, or whether, the administration would officially announce it.

Results of the early warnings could be confirmed at a network of laboratories within 24 hours using DNA analysis, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The system was tested throughout 2002, including at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, the official said.

Nightmare scenarios envisioned by bioterrorism experts include a small plane flying above a community, releasing anthrax or other germs over a large gathering of people.

Depending on the winds, thousands of people could become ill, yet it could take days to figure out what happened.

The sooner health officials detect a bioterrorism incident, the sooner they can properly treat victims with vaccines or antibiotics and protect others who might become infected.

Under the system, first reported in Wednesday's editions of The New York Times, monitoring systems now run by the Environmental Protection Agency will be

adapted to check for a number of biological agents. The systems, which filter air, were created to measure pollutants and the quality of the air.

If a station detects something suspicious, samples would be sent to the closest of some 120 labs that are part of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Laboratory Response Network. Results from these labs would be available within 12 to 24 hours, depending on the tests being conducted, the administration official said.

The tests involve genetic analysis using polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, techniques. They examine the genetic fingerprint of a germ sample, and make a quick and accurate determination as to what it is.

These tests are considered much

Bill aids conservation

By Michelle L. Hawkins

The Goodland Daily News

Farmers and ranchers may be eligible for government help with conservation practices under the new farm bill signed last May by President Bush. The best way to find out is to go in and talk with the experts.

Over \$6.1 billion is being set aside over the next six years for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which encourages conservation efforts.

Fred Wedel, district conservationist here for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, said the money for the program comes from \$17.1 billion in conservation money reserved by the Farm Bill in the next 10 years.

"This represents an 80 percent increase in funding from previous farm bills, which have traditionally been underfunded," Wedel said.

Through the program, he said, farmers and ranchers can receive financial and technical help to install or implement structural and management conservation practices.

Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pasture and private non-industrial forest land. Wedel said farmers and ranchers who are wanting to know if their land fits the program should contact his office,

since there are a few other types of land which are eligible.

People who want a conservation plan can apply for a contract under the program. The conservation service evaluates each application and gives it a ranking, Wedel said. Higher priorities are given to project which use cost-effective conservation practices, address national priorities and optimize environmental benefits.

Wedel said that just because a project gets a lower rating and isn't approved now, doesn't mean that it might not be approved later, when there might be no projects with higher ratings.

Even if previous applications have been turned down, Wedel says farmers and ranchers should apply again and not wait until the last minute.

"Earlier applications may not have ranked high in priority," Wedel said, "but that does not mean they did not have a valid resource concern."

He said that applications will be ranked to maximize environmental benefits, but with more money, more applications will be approved.

The program can pay up to 75 percent of the costs of some conservation practices. Incentive payments are available to encourage farmers to adopt target land management practices.

For farmers with limited resources and beginning farmers, the program can pay for up to 90 percent of the costs.

Farmers can apply any time throughout the year by going into the conservation service office. Wedel said it is important for farmers and ranchers to apply each year for Farm Bill assistance, since applications do not roll over from year to year.

There are many options available to producers and many changes from the previous Farm Bill, he said. Applications for financial aid from the Farm Bill can apply to air quality, grazing lands health, water quality and water quantity problems.

"It's best if you, as a farmer or rancher, come sit in my office and talk about available options," Wedel said.

There's more information on the 2002 farm bill on the website, www.ks.usda.nrcs.gov, clicking on the farm bill logo. People can also go to the local office at 210 West 10th Street, Suite 1, or call 899-3070 ext 39.

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