

PLENARY SESSION

EPA's Role in Emergency Response and Homeland Security

Janet McCabe, Deputy Administrator | *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

Dr. Janet McCabe thanked participants for joining the 2021 Decontamination Conference and expressed how thrilled she was to join the group for her very first conference on this topic. She acknowledged the relevance and expressed hope for 2022 to be in-person to celebrate the community's collective efforts and work.

No matter the threat, EPA is working to protect our traditional, native lands, and this year marked the 20th anniversary since September 11, 2001 and the 10th anniversary since Fukushima, all while coping with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Dr. McCabe suggested using this conference has a time of reflection for what it means to protect public health and safeguard the environment, and to also serve as a reminder to be prepared to respond to whatever comes next.

EPA's mission is to protect public health and the environment and has the responsibility to prevent, limit, mitigate, and/or contain chemical, oil, radiological, biological, and natural or man-made disasters in the United States while providing environmental monitoring assessment and reporting when incidents occur. To address new issues, EPA is committed to taking a whole-of-Agency approach using traditional policies and programs with new priorities including building resilience to climate change, climate security, threats of the use of non-traditional chemicals, insider threats, and cyber security. Dr. McCabe expressed that under the Biden/Harris Administration, climate impacts are an essential element to U.S. foreign policy and national security considerations as we work towards a sustainable climate pathway. Addressing global health security and biodefense issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, will revitalize and expand global health and help security initiatives reduce the risk of future biological catastrophes whether naturally occurring, accidental, or deliberate and rebuild and strengthen federal, state, local, and tribal preparedness, making us more resilient as a nation over time. This broader focus requires increased engagement, partnerships, and increased research and development.

Dr. McCabe noted the nation looks to the EPA for leading science, and that includes public health emergencies. The conference participants' research provides a strong foundation for policy decisions and push towards the next discovery. Dr. McCabe challenged all the conference participants to learn from one another and think big. The Decontamination Conference is known as the largest and most recognized civilian-led conference on shared research and collaboration related to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents and natural disasters. Dr. McCabe closed by asking participants to think about resources issues, programs, and how to train responders and communities.
