

THE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION'S SECOND ANNUAL

BIODEFENSE WORLD SUMMIT 2016

June 27-30, 2016 | Hilton Baltimore | Baltimore, MD



SPEAKER Q & A

Michael Walter, Detection Branch Chief & Program Manager, BioWatch, US Department of Homeland Security, recently sat down to speak about his upcoming presentation “BioWatch: The Future of Biodetection” at the Biodetection Technologies: Point-of-Care for Biodefense conference to be held June 28-29, 2016, as part of the 2nd Annual Biodefense World Summit in Baltimore, MD.



Dr. Michael V. Walter is the BioWatch Program Manager within the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Affairs. He is responsible for management of the only national level environmental surveillance system tasked designed to detect aerosolized biological warfare agents. His duties include the monitoring the performance of 30 analytical laboratories; aiding state and local public health departments in preparation of response plans for use in the event of a biological attack, as well as scheduling and conducting exercises to test those preparations. Dr. Walter is responsible for the testing, acquisition, deployment and operation of an automated biodetection system to replace the system presently in operation. He is also responsible for fostering partnerships between BioWatch and the state and local public health community as well as other Federal Agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Department of Defense (DoD).

Q: What are you planning to discuss with the audience at the Biodefense World Summit?

The BioWatch Program is the Nation's only biodetection capability that provides early warning and facilitates preparedness in 30+ jurisdictions across the United States. Bio-Watch operates a network of air-monitoring collectors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. Early warning of a biological attack provides a critical window of time in order to dispense lifesaving medical countermeasures. BioWatch enables local, state and federal decision makers to develop a common understanding of an incident, determine appropriate response actions, how to best focus resources, and maintain situational awareness. At the Summit I plan to provide the user community (government and academic laboratories) and industry an overview of how the BioWatch Program intends to address identified capability gaps, such as detection timeliness, indoor operational constraints, and public health concerns, including maintaining viability of target agents. We are working with partners at the DHS Science & Technology Directorate to build requirements in order to develop technologies that will make the program more effective by addressing the identified capability gaps, and we are positioning ourselves to adapt progressive techniques, such as advanced sequencing methods. Additionally, the program is developing in-

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To learn more about Dr. Walter's presentation and the Biodefense World Summit, visit

BiodefenseWorldSummit.com/Biodetection-Technologies

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formation technology platforms to enhance public health situational awareness across BioWatch jurisdictions that will provide essential information to decision makers at all levels of government. I am very interested to hear from the audience – their ideas, constructive criticism, and suggestions.

Q: What drew you to work at BioWatch? Why did you take on this type of work?

BioWatch presents a complex and challenging environment across multiple areas, including the technological, operational, and financial aspects of the program. It's given me the opportunity to engage with multiple agencies across the federal government and speak on behalf of a program that's very important, relevant, and often misunderstood. Since the program is operational nationwide, I've also had the opportunity to meet with the program's state and local stakeholders, including public health officials, emergency managers, and first responders, who manage the program's day-to-day operations and provide the boots on the ground in the event of a biological incident. Many of these stakeholders support BioWatch in addition to their regular responsibilities – without additional funding. Their dedication to public health and the security of their communities, as well as unwavering support for the program, is truly inspiring.

Q: What are major obstacles in your field of work?

Major obstacles include finding the balance between competing program priorities while facing budget constraints. Such competing priorities include balancing the need for technology improvements while ensuring that operational needs of our jurisdictions are met. Another challenge is ensuring operational security while balancing the need for engaging stakeholders and the public to understand the value of this program, as well as educating Congress the value of BioWatch at the state and local levels. It's a tightrope walk.

Q: What's revolutionizing your field of research?

Rapid advances in biotechnology, synthetic biology, sequencing, and information technology.

Q: What keeps you up at night?

How to correct misrepresentations about the BioWatch Program – including what the Program is and is not responsible for – and how to get the right BioWatch story out there.