TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE

TRANSPORTATION OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

MAY 5, 1989

DSW 136604

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My name is Jefrey A. Johnson. I am the Director of Public Safety and Service for the City of Cambridge and I have served in this capacity for approximately five (5) years.

In June of 1987, Cambridge experienced its first major hazardous material spill. From the time of notification to our fire department, to the time the clean-up process was complete, approximately 16 hours had elapsed. Initially, several telephone calls were made in an effort to ascertain information on the hazards of this chemical, what action to take and what action not to take.

Throughout this incident, radio communications were confusing. Information to individuals at the scene arrived slow. Firefighters had a genuine concern for their personal safety. Mobile telephone equipment was not available to us until later that afternoon, hours after the initial notification.

The first responders had no hazardous materials suits and subsequently could not reach the placard on the truck to confirm its contents. We have been fortunate enough to have some basic training for hazardous materials, however, due to the lack of funding, training and education is limited.

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In the aftermath of the spill, we have been able to purchase an air compressor, and a limited number of disposable hazardous material suits. These suits are for one time use and are protection from chemicals, but of course, not all hazardous chemicals and wastes. We were able to purchase these items largely due to donations received from the community. The generator of the chemical donated 3 mobile telephones to the city. Only after the spill was the need for these items perceived within the community.

Congressman Applegate's proposed bill addresses the needs of emergency response personnel both at the local and national level. A definitive information data base from which information can be retrieved quickly, will mean the difference between life, death, serious injury and long term health effects to first responders across this nation.

Training and the updating of equipment and protective clothing is an ongoing process. New chemicals, new types of hazardous waste are discovered and transported almost daily. Cambridge is not unique in the lack of funding for our personnel to be trained and to fight hazardous material releases. Communication equipment is sorely needed to reduce the time information is received by personnel at the scene.

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National specifications for equipment, training and protective clothing is a dire need. At the time the City purchased hazardous material suits, the fire department had to use their own judgment for which type to buy, as there are no set standards.

Finally, a flow study will not only improve enforcement of regulations in this area, but enable emergency personnel to efficiently determine the type of equipment, protective clothing and training most needed in their locality. Therefore, allowing public money to be expended based upon good, solid information to better protect the health, safety, and welfare of the American people.

I wish to thank the committee for allowing me to provide this information in the hope that a deeper understanding of the importance for the passage of this proposed bill is gained.

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