

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Workshop on "Incident Command System"

Belmopan - 15 July, 2008

A three-day event entitled "Incident Command Applications" got underway today at the George Price Center in Belmopan.

The course deals with the chain of command that should be followed by first-responders in the event of any agricultural disaster or health emergency situation in Belize. These first-responders would include, among others, personnel from the Belize Agriculture Health Authority, BAHA; the Ministry of Health, the National Emergency Management Organization, NEMO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

In his opening remarks, Chief Executive Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Gabino Canto, mentioned that training in the Incident Command System is essential because any response to whatever cause, must have a proper and dynamic structure, if it is to be appropriate, efficient and effective.

CEO Canto said that in agriculture, they have already conducted emergency response desktop exercises, for foreign animal diseases such as foot and mouth disease, avian influenza and classical swine fever; but that they have had little input from first responders other than from the agricultural staff. "Thus, I am quite pleased to note that in this training we see not only BAHA personnel but also personnel from NEMO, the Ministry of Health and the United States Department of Agriculture", Mr. Canto pointed out.

The need for countries to have a tested Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan for Avian Influenza and Influenza Pandemic led to the formation in Belize of a disaster mitigation plan under NEMO, with the Ministry of Agriculture chairing this particular committee. This was done because it was realized that an effective response to a highly contagious animal or human disease outbreak requires coordination of not only the critical disease control response, but of the many expected activities needed to support those specialized functions.

Mr. Canto concluded his address to the participants saying, "The Government of Belize continues to be committed to safeguarding national security, public health and the health status of our animals, especially food animals. By your presence and active participation during the three days workshop, I can see that you too are committed to safeguarding the health and life of people and animals in Belize."

Mr. John E. Roberts of JER Consulting LLC, is leading the training and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is sponsoring the event.