Testimony
Economic Impact Committee
11:20 am; Thursday, November 19, 2015
North Dakota Department of Health

Madam Chair, members of the committee, I am Tim Wiedrich Section Chief of the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Section. The EPR Section is responsible for planning and coordinating public health and medical responses to daily emergencies and large scale disasters. Those responses include a wide range of activities, from an ambulance responding to a cardiac call to a large scale disaster that requires the evacuation of hospitals and nursing homes. The NDDoH coordinates the disaster response components of public health and medical systems under the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services as part of the state's emergency management plan. Those components include all public health, hospitals, clinics, emergency medical services, nursing homes and other entities contained in an integrated response system.

Strong situational awareness is an important component of mounting an efficient and effective response. NDDoH envisions the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that carry surveillance and other hazard detection equipment as an extremely important tool to gather information necessary to maintain situational awareness.

The types of missions we envision using UAVs for include surveillance of hazards that are difficult or dangerous to observe directly by personnel, such as breaching dikes and dams, fire or wind damaged medical facilities, triage staging areas where mass disaster casualty victims are categorized for treatment and transport, large response vehicle and medical equipment staging areas, explosive environments, and leaking pipelines.

The use of UAV equipment is more cost effective and efficient than past methods of mounting video surveillance cameras on incident command trucks. For example, the cost of a pneumatic mast and high quality pan tilt zoom camera on one of our incident command trucks would be in excess of $20,000. The cost of an appropriate UAV with greater capability is approximately $1,500. The UAV has the added benefit of being mobile, which allows it to provide real time high quality surveillance video from a wide range of heights and angles.

As part of our movement into this technology, the NDDoH intends to partner with the Northern Plains UAS Test Site for assistance with the acquisition and implementation phases of obtaining this capability. Analysis and coordination of data from a variety of response disciplines would serve to create a stronger, more accurate understanding of emergency situations. A better, near real time understanding of the situations we are responding to will no doubt improve the safety and effectiveness of our responses.

This concludes my presentation. I will be happy to answer your questions.