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DPH IMPLEMENTS RUNNER TRACKING SYSTEM FOR MARATHON
Bar Codes on Racing Bibs Allows Tracking and Identification of Those with Medical Issues

FRAMINGHAM, MA - The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), in collaboration with the Boston Athletic Association (BAA) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), will be implementing a real time mobile handheld Internet based runner locator and tracking system using bar code scanning technology for the 2006 Boston Marathon.

The Boston Marathon is a world-class event attracting over 20,000 runners each year, including the world's elite runners, as well as many spectators and visitors. Every year, families and friends of runners gather at the finish area and grow concerned if a runner does not finish when expected. The complexity of the 26-mile racecourse has made it challenging to identify where along the course a runner is located as the racecourse traverses eight communities and potentially impacts ten different hospitals.

Each year MDPH and MEMA support the overall operations of the event and use it as an opportunity for the state to exercise components of a Mass Casualty Response. The establishment of a Unified Command Center at MEMA Headquarters in Framingham, the placement of Red Cross first aid stations and DMAT tents along the course, hospital surge preparedness efforts, and EMS response planning have been implemented over recent years. This year, the new features include the addition of a runner locator system using bar code scanning technology. The runners' bibs have been pre-printed with unique bar codes. Through a contract with Stratix Corporation, we will scan the location of runners seeking care at 48 data entry points along the route using hand held wireless scanning devices. This information will be transmitted to the IRIS[®] software system to assist the BAA in locating runners. The software system will have the capability to generate real time reports on runner location, as well as data that can be used in planning future races such as the number of runners who access care along the route and the duration of stay at a treatment site.

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This project will provide valuable information for the development of statewide patient tracking system for medical emergencies and catastrophic mass casualty events. Recent experience with large-scale disasters such as Hurricane Katrina has highlighted the importance of patient tracking and locating capabilities. The Boston Marathon project will provide important experience with the technology and system capabilities as we move toward the development of a statewide tracking system to enhance our overall emergency preparedness.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and All Hazards Preparedness, go to the MEMA website at www.mass.gov/mema.