

## Georgia companies act as anti-terrorism militia

DANIEL YEE, *Associated Press*

**ATLANTA** - If there were a bioterrorism attack or flu pandemic, Georgia officials would have to come to the aid of thousands in a hurry. One problem: It would take an impromptu army of workers to help residents in such a crisis.

State officials couldn't corral enough employees for such a huge task, but Georgia businesses can. And that's not all the private sector has to offer.

Georgia's companies lead the world in their fields. Logistics? There's UPS Inc., which routinely transports cargo - from lifesaving vaccines to emergency equipment - all over the world. Delta Air Lines Inc. has planes and experience moving mass numbers of people. Soft drink king The Coca-Cola Co. could supply bottled water.

"We've made it very clear in the event of any kind of public emergency, public government officials, emergency officials should not hesitate to reach out to us and to know we would do anything to help," said UPS spokesman Norman Black.

Across the country, businesses are joining together to help with emergency planning.

Companies in New Jersey and Kansas City have pledged to make their experts, trucks, warehouses available to local governments if needed. Similar efforts are being started in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In addition, Massachusetts businesses helped state officials with emergency planning for the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

It's part of an effort by **Business Executives for National Security**, also known as BENS. The nonprofit organization of business executives began to lend their expertise to the federal government with homeland security and other critical national issues 23 years ago.

"We believe that national and homeland security are everybody's business, not just those in the Beltway in Washington, it's far too important," said **Conrad Busch**, director of BENS' Metro Atlanta region. He oversees the Georgia Business Force, the efforts of Georgia businesses willing to help out.

"Traditionally business and government have

been suspicious of each other and that is healthy. But if we're going to all work together to thwart and defeat terrorism, then we're going to have to come together a little bit," Busch said.

The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks showed that state governments also could benefit from businesses in times of crisis.

"After 9-11 in the New Jersey area, particularly because of the impact there, there was a movement that started ... to say 'Hey, we should be doing something similar to what we're doing at the federal level at the state level' because it will be the state who will need to respond" to a crisis like a terrorist attack, said *Walter Gramm*, executive director of the **New Jersey Business Force**.

New York- and New Jersey-area officials learned after the Sept. 11 attacks that business and government officials need to coordinate together to avoid duplication of resources in one area and scarcity in another. For example, Gramm said he remembers being overrun with "tractor-trailer loads" of dog food after an official on a radio program said it was sorely needed.

In Georgia, state public health officials asked the Georgia Business Force to see if its member companies could spare extra flu shots during shortages the last few years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention turned to the Georgia Business Force earlier this year when the federal health agency was working on its preparations against a severe flu season or a flu pandemic.

Businesses might be able to detect an outbreak early through employee absences or even disease detection by astute company health clinic nurses or doctors, said Lisa Koonin, chief of business sector partnerships for CDC.

"State and local health departments can't do it all," Koonin said. "Because preparing for public health emergencies is so similar - no matter if it's a natural issue or an infectious disease or a terrorist problem - there are similarities in the types of planning that can occur and impacts they might have on the business community."