

VANCOUVER - Vancouver medical health officer Dr. John Blatherwick says he now agrees that the suspected poisoning on a TransLink bus last month was actually a case of mass anxiety and that for him, the case is now closed.

FROM MAY 28, 2004: Mass hysteria blamed for bus incident

Late last month a UBC epidemiologist had said the incident appeared to be a textbook case of mass hysteria. And Dr. Richard Mathias said that the phenomenon is on the increase in the post-911 world of bio-terrorism fears.

INTERVIEW: The Early Edition's Rick Cluff spoke with Dr. Richard Mathias on May 28, 2004.

Response teams searched bus for toxins

Blatherwick notes that the ongoing investigation has produced no evidence that there was any poisonous substance on board the bus. A bus driver and several other people became ill, people in the immediate area were quarantined and the hazardous materials team was called in. "They found the substance on the bus that was subsequently identified as an acorn. so we knew that that wasn't the cause of the problems," he says. Blatherwick doesn't fault the high-level emergency response to the bus incident saying there was enough evidence to warrant calling in the hazardous materials team.

FROM MAY 26, 2004: Bus sickness still a mystery

Vancouver police are continuing to try to pinpoint the mystery toxin, and to track down a suspect bus passenger who may have made a cryptic threat to the driver. But Blatherwick thinks that trail is cold. "I think we're going to have to file this one away as an event that occurred but no cause was found. "And therefore hysteria's probably a good an explanation as any," he says. Since Sept. 11, 2001, public health officials in B.C. have dealt with many suspected cases of bioterrorism, that turned out to be nothing. Now, all such threats have to meet a credibility test, before full-scale public health responses kick in.