



MEMO



N O R T H C A R O L I N A D I V I S I O N O F
E M E R G E N C Y M A N A G E M E N T

HazMat Training Prepares Agencies for the Unexpected

Imagine this. Your family is sleeping peacefully at home, not far from the main highway, when you are awakened by a strange sound. Dismissing it, you go back to sleep. Thirty minutes later, your sleep is disturbed again, but this time by a strong aroma. You notice a dark cloud floating across your yard like the thick fog of daybreak and wonder what is happening. You are starting to panic and don't know what to do. Do response agencies know what's going on? If so, why aren't they here? Scary scenario, isn't it?



The two-part TRANSCAER course will provide first responders with the training needed to respond to spills such as the one shown here. RRT-5 crews responded to this methylbenzene spill on Hwy 150 in Davidson County March 9.

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Exposure to hazardous materials or unknown chemicals can happen at any time. Such exposure is often due to spills that occur while substances are transported via highway or railroad. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Hazard Materials Information Systems, there were 388 accidents on North Carolina's highways and eight accidents on the railroad in 2009.

Because of the potential for hazmat spills during transit, N.C. Emergency Management has been working with local communities to strengthen planning for and response to hazmat incidents. This spring, more than 125 first responders and emergency management staff from more than 30 agencies will test their skills during a two-part course.

In April, the group tested their teamwork and organization skills as they responded to a mock cargo train derailment during a tabletop exercise. In the scenario, a train derailment near a food distribution center caused an explosion that released hazardous materials thus threatening area residents and businesses.

"The tabletop exercise demonstrated the massive coordination effort that takes place among multiple agencies from various response disciplines in a realistic stress-tested environment," said Chris Rose, state Regional Response Team program manager.

The tabletop exercise was a precursor for a hands-on exercise scheduled May 12 -13. During the hands-on exercise, agencies actually will move vehicles, personnel and equipment. They also will respond to emergency needs such as helping victims, extinguishing chemical fires and ordering evacuations based on real weather conditions.

Both exercises are sponsored by TRANSCAER (**T**ransportation **C**ommunity **A**wareness and **E**mergency **R**esponse). TRANSCAER is a voluntary national outreach effort that helps communities near major transportation routes prepare for hand respond to possible hazardous materials incidents. Representatives from chemical manufacturing, transportation, distribution and private emergency response, as well as local, state and federal government agencies make up the group's volunteer members.

“The full-scale exercise will bring together all of the trainings, meetings and workshops in which TRANSCAER, local businesses and governments have been participating,” says Rose. “This exercise will show what emergency response agencies are capable of when the unexpected happens.”

Southeast Search and Rescue Teams Test Their Skills

by Diane Curtis, NCEM Area 3 Coordinator

Lost. Somewhere deep in the backwoods near Vanceboro, an injured hunter needed help.

This was the scene during the early hours of Saturday, April 17 as more than 45 volunteers arrived to participate in Craven County's first regional search and rescue exercise.

First responders from Craven, Lenoir and Greene counties, along with staff from N.C. Emergency Management and the Coastal Carolina Search Team from Pitt County started their day with coffee and donuts from the local Salvation Army. Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 10 team members from Greenville and New Bern joined them for the exercise.

After check-in, personnel were assigned to their sections under the Incident Command System. Incident Commander Ira Whitford, who works as assistant director for Craven County Emergency Services, described the scenario and objectives for the volunteers and the search was on.

Tracks in the sand, a hat and evidence of an injury began to emerge, telling the story of where the lost hunter had been and where he was going.

“We learned so much today,” explained Whitford after the exercise. “Everyone came together in their roles and did a terrific job. We have a lot of searches in the county, so it just makes sense to practice when we can.”

The planning section prepared maps and work assignments, while operations and logistics prepared the site and personnel for work.

“Planning is key,” added Whitford. “We are racing against time and a life may be at stake, so a good plan is a must. Then, it is up to the operations section to execute that plan.”

Ground searchers covered approximately 500 acres in a four-hour period, tracking the lost subject through swamp, woods and sandy areas, while braving snakes and ticks. Three K-9 groups were deployed to help pinpoint the hunter's location. Clues were tagged as evidence and prepped for release to local law enforcement.



Ira Whitford, Incident Commander (right) explains the objectives for the search to Terry Gaskin, operations chief.



Dianne Curtis, NCEM Area Three Coordinator (left) receives an overview of the scenario from Coastal Carolina Search Team member Benny Davis.

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Search and Rescue continued

The search teams found the missing hunter around 12:30 p.m., just in time for lunch.

“This is what we do,” explained Chris Crousore, disaster team coordinator. “Whether it is a practice or real event, we are here to support any way we can, any time we can.”

Chris and his four-man team served snacks for breakfast, hot hamburgers for lunch and beef stew for dinner. Participants welcomed the hospitality and hearty foods as they rested between the scheduled searches.

After lunch, scenario number two began: a man with dementia walked away from his house. Energized by the morning session, participants fell comfortably back into their roles and set about finding the man as soon as possible.

“Overall, the exercise was a definite success,” said Whitford. “We are thankful to have great partnerships with our local agencies, as well as our surrounding counties. Everyone did an outstanding job. The ultimate reward will come during the next real event.”



Members from Little Swift Creek Volunteer Fire Department and search and rescue Task Force 10 work on incident action plans.

Tornadoes Touch Down in the Triad

On March 28, heavy rain, wind, hail and tornadoes swept through central and eastern North Carolina. More than 460 homes were damaged in Davidson and Guilford counties, 40 of which were destroyed.

Gov. Bev Perdue declared a state disaster for the two counties which bore the brunt of the damage. The declaration allows residents to apply for funding to use towards home repairs or to replace clothing and household items.

County, state and federal emergency management officials conducted a joint damage assessment on April 1. Officials from N.C. Emergency Management and the U.S. Small Business Administration met with storm victims April 9-15 at two disaster recovery centers and accepted 85 applications for assistance. Storm victims in adjacent counties of Alamance, Davie, Forsyth, Montgomery, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly and Stokes are also eligible for the low-interest loans.

Storm victims can apply for SBA assistance for physical damage until June 7 and for economic injury until Jan. 7, 2011 by contacting 800-659-2955. Applications for state assistance ended April 15.



Crews look at damage to a child care facility in Guilford County.



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Statewide Hurricane Exercise Held

More than 35 agencies that make up the North Carolina State Emergency Response Team will participate in a two-day hurricane exercise to prepare for the 2010 hurricane season.

The exercise will take place May 4 - 5 in select emergency operation centers, field offices and locations throughout the state. The purpose is to provide agencies with an opportunity to rehearse their plans, test statewide communication interoperability and redundancies and increase proficiency in HURREVAC 2010, a computer program used by emergency managers to track hurricanes.

The Tropical Meteorology Project at Colorado State University has forecasted an above-average hurricane season including 11 to 16 named storms, six to eight hurricanes, including three to five major hurricanes with sustained winds greater than 111 miles per hour.

Hurricane Preparedness Week

Hurricane Preparedness Week is May 23 - 29. During this week, local and state emergency management officials will talk about their preparations for hurricane season which runs June 1- Nov. 30.

Families and businesses are urged to start preparing, as well, by putting together their emergency supply kits, then making and rehearsing plans for where to go and what to do if a hurricane threatens the state. NCEM is preparing for the upcoming season by conducting several meetings and exercises.

Local Agencies Demonstrate Response Capabilities for Brunswick Plant Incident

N.C. Emergency Management, along with local and federal agencies, will conduct a series of exercises in May to demonstrate their response capabilities to an event at the Brunswick Nuclear Power Plant.

Although the formal nuclear exercise is June 22, the field activities will take place May 10 – 14 in both Brunswick and New Hanover counties. Scheduled demonstrations include waterway warning, reception centers and shelter operations and emergency worker decontamination. Federal regulators will evaluate how effective emergency response agencies execute each activity.

NCEM Earns National Award for Coastal Plan

The N.C. Division of Emergency Management received the Outstanding Achievement Award for the Coastal Region Evacuation and Sheltering Standards Operating Guide (CRESS-SOG).

The CRESS-SOG matched counties which are at risk from storm surge flooding with those who will host evacuees by providing safe shelter from the storm. The guide identifies ways to evacuate or shelter elderly and medically-fragile citizens in 20 coastal counties to get them out of harms way. It addresses managing mass evacuations, assigning resources, sheltering fragile populations and the general populace and disseminating public information.

National Hurricane Center Director Bill Read presented the award April 1 to Doug Hoell, state emergency management director during the annual National Hurricane Conference in Florida. North Carolina was the only state to receive the award.

Hoell Selected for National Task Force

North Carolina Emergency Management Director Doug Hoell has been appointed as a member of the newly-formed national Preparedness Task Force. The group will work with members of Congress, as well as representatives from private organizations, to identify preparedness policies, guidelines and grant programs that will improve the nation's capability for disaster response.

The task force is made up of 35 members of local, state and tribal governments with diverse experience in homeland security and emergency management.

Hoell has more than 30 years of experience in emergency management. Cherryville Fire Chief Jeffery Cash also was appointed to the task force.



NCEM Director Doug Hoell

Hurricane Workshop Held at East Carolina University

North Carolina Emergency Management and East Carolina University will team up to conduct a hurricane workshop May 26 from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Murphy Center on campus.

The workshop is designed to teach participants about resources that may help them respond to hurricanes. Topics include: Hurrevac 2010, ECU research projects, meteorological updates, the recovery process and evacuation and sheltering procedures.

Invited participants include emergency managers, county managers, elected officials and other key personnel who have responsibilities before, during and after a hurricane.

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"In the Business of Saving Lives and Protecting Property"

The North Carolina Division of Emergency Management was formed in 1977 to coordinate the preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities of all agencies for emergency management within North Carolina. It performs this mission by planning, organizing, staffing, equipping, training, testing and activating emergency management programs during times of need.