



FEMA

Toxic Agent Offers Real-World Response Skills Training
—One-Of-A-Kind Training Facility for Today’s Response Force
By CDP Public Affairs

The man-made threat facing America and the international community is real. Reports indicate terrorists are seeking opportunities to use Chemical, Biological and Radiological methods that will result in death and disrupt daily operations.

How long will it take before terrorists have Weapons of Mass Destruction? The answer isn’t clear. But preparing emergency response personnel to meet the threat head-on starts at the COBRATF—the Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological Training Facility in Anniston, Ala. But for responders who have trained there, it’s simply the COBRA.

The COBRA is operated by the Center for Domestic Preparedness, a federal training facility under the leadership of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Department of Homeland Security.

What makes the COBRA unique is that it’s the only facility in the nation that offers emergency responders an opportunity to operate in an environment using the nerve agents GB and VX.

According to the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, the measures of confidence are clearly higher for personnel who train with genuine toxic agents than for those who train with a simulated agent.

Responder students walk away from the COBRA training experience with the self-assurance to enter a contaminated environment, perform their responsibilities to rescue victims, and mitigate the scene without becoming victims themselves.

“Training in a toxic agent environment, using genuine nerve agent is an experience you can only get here,” commented Woody Davis, who manages COBRA operations. “If we simulated the toxic material, responders would leave here without the confidence they need to succeed in a real-world situation. COBRA training gives them that confidence.”

Upon completion of construction in March 1987, the COBRA was operated by the U.S. Army Chemical School. The facility was transferred to the federal government following the 1998 closure of Fort McClellan. Had the transfer not been granted, the building would have been vacated, boarded up, and a significant monetary investment wasted. Since 1999, more than 35,000 emergency responders throughout the nation and its U.S. Territories have experienced the toxic agent facility.

(MORE)

Toxic Agent Offers Real-World Response Skills Training (Cont.)

“This is one of the best uses of taxpayer dollars I have ever seen,” said Don Cornell, COBRA assistant director. “This facility was designed for nerve agent training and reutilizing it to train America’s response force was smart thinking. The COBRA has made a difference to the nation’s preparedness.”

The COBRA consists of a specially-designed indoor environment where responders participate in hands-on detection exercises. Using specialized equipment and proper protocols, responder students detect WMD threats, as well as recognize and treat symptoms of toxic agent poisoning.

Responders participating in COBRA courses include a variety of disciplines. Traditional emergency responders such as HazMat technicians, firefighters, and law enforcement may train beside healthcare providers, public health officials, or 911 dispatchers, to name a few.

“This training is relevant to all emergencies,” added Davis. “Not all urgent situations will be man-made, involving chemical or biological weapons. Some are accidents such as a train derailment or an accidental chemical spill. COBRA training can be adapted to any response.”

Emergency responders attending a COBRA course leave the CDP confident that they have the ability to perform in situations requiring emergency response, should it happen where they live and work. Responders who successfully complete the course are presented the coveted COBRA pin—a King Cobra in a hooded threat display, a recognizable warning posture—signifying their successful entry and execution of tasks in a toxic environment.

Training at the COBRA facility is a unique opportunity for responders of nearly a dozen disciplines. Graduates walk away with confidence in their protective clothing and the skills they learned during training. And they know they can operate in a toxic environment—because they trained at the COBRA.

The Center for Domestic Preparedness offers 42 courses that are provided at no cost to a responder or their jurisdiction. Learn more about these training opportunities at <http://cdp.dhs.gov> or call 866-213-9553.