

EMO Offers Hands-On Experience for All Disciplines

Improved Training Venues Enhance Learning Environment

Known for offering extensive hands-on training in a mass casualty response, the Emergency Medical Operations (EMO) for CBRNE Incidents course provides first response personnel, serving in a variety of positions, necessary skills to perform during an emergency or catastrophic event. The Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP), located in Anniston, Ala., focuses its training on incident management and mass casualty response to manmade or natural disasters.

The EMO course was established in 2005 and provides healthcare emergency personnel, as well as fire fighters, law enforcement, and other responders who may share a healthcare incident, the knowledge, confidence, and specialized skills to respond during a mass casualty emergency. EMO is designed to simulate a hazardous materials response, including treatment of multiple survivors exposed to potential chemical, biological, or radiological hazards.

Tools for Learning

“It is very informative and interactive,” said Beth Fletcher, Emergency Medical Technician. “I didn’t know anything about hazardous material medical response until I came here. I know a lot more now and I am more comfortable and feel confident in what I’m doing.”

Dan Bledsoe, a fire captain with 27 years of service, wasn’t sure what to expect from the EMO course. He said learning never stops, regardless of experience.

“I figured I had seen it all and done it all,” said Bledsoe. “After the first day of training I found I was very much wrong. In one week here you can pick up so much knowledge and I feel this will benefit a person’s career. I enjoyed the team aspect. We were overwhelmed with patients and this course provided us all an opportunity to work with total strangers. It gave some a chance to practice leadership and others a chance to be a functioning member of a team—with people you have never worked with before.”

“The objective of the course is to take emergency personnel and give them an opportunity to train in a hazardous environment with mass casualties,” said John Skinner, EMO course manager. “EMO provides a chance to work in the warm zone, as well as the cold zone and move patients to the hospital.”

Students attending EMO wear appropriate levels of Personal Protective Equipment while providing medical care and perform actions to conduct decontamination, triage, treatment, transport, and tracking survivors of a CBRNE incident or a mass casualty incident.

The CDP recently initiated the Integrated Capstone Event (ICE) into training. The ICE is currently conducted once a quarter and allows courses, like EMO, to integrate with other training during a large-scale, end-of-week, exercise combining multiple courses.

Improved Training Venues

“Over the past year we have evolved the EMO course to include more information for the emergency responder,” said Charles Platt, lead healthcare instructor. “We enhanced the training environment using didactic training methods that provide students a hands-on approach, reinforcing the lecture material presented in the classroom.”

The CDP training staff has enhanced several programs to include EMO. The course now offers students an opportunity to experience multiple scenarios in lifelike settings and environments depicting common, and the not-so-common, emergencies found in a variety of jurisdictions.

“We have the ability to bring responders from all different disciplines and demonstrate how vital the EMS role is during an emergency event,” said Richard Barrett, healthcare instructor. “We are able to demonstrate to first responders what they can expect in the field. We also show the smallest EMS department, up to the largest EMS department, how we all work together to accomplish the end goal of getting survivors from the scene all the way to the hospital.”

Beneficial to all Levels of Response

According to Richard Whiddon, an emergency room physician attending CDP training for the first time, EMO seemed well organized and gave him a better appreciation for EMS field response, and how the different roles complement each other during an emergency.

“A lot of higher level healthcare personnel have not been on the front lines to experience response from a first responder’s point of view,” said Whiddon. “I believe this experience—the scenarios and actually getting hands on experience is priceless and gives me a better understanding for what [responders] do. It would be nice to see higher level physicians and mid level providers take the course so they understand.”

Nearly 3,000 students have completed the EMO course over the past seven years. The average class size is 40 students and personnel attending EMO participate in scenarios applying Incident Command principles for medical operations and incorporating the application of emergency medical tasks to a CBRNE incident.

CDP training provides a relevant approach to the needs of first response. The Emergency Medical Operations for CBRNE Incidents course returns responders to their home jurisdiction with the confidence and knowledge to respond during a mass casualty surge.

The CDP is a component of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Training and Education Division in the Department of Homeland Security. The Anniston training center is the nation's only federally-chartered Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) training facility for civilian responders and training is fully funded.

Learn more about the CDP at <http://cdp.dhs.gov>.

-30-

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