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## **Responding through training**

### **—Preparing Emergency Response Providers for tomorrow’s threat**

By Shannon Arledge, CDP Public Affairs

The Center for Domestic Preparedness trains emergency response providers from State, local, and tribal governments, as well as the Federal government, foreign governments, and private entities when appropriate. Since its establishment in 1998, the CDP has graduated more than 440,000 responder-students.

“There has been substantial growth in the last 10 years,” said Donnie Belser, course manager for the incident command courses. “Our success says a lot about the commitment from everyone who works here. It’s one team that contributes to CDP excellence.”

Located in Anniston, Alabama, the CDP offers 39 courses that address everything from radiation contamination and “all-hazards” incident management to pandemic influenza and healthcare leadership. The CDP is a vital component of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Preparedness Directorate and is the nation’s only congressionally-chartered Federal training facility for live chemical / nerve agents – also known as chemical weapons of mass destruction – for civilian emergency responders.

“The CDP offers emergency responders a unique experience to receive hands-on training to respond to hazardous incidents whether accidental or intentional,” said Denis Campeau, Director of Training and Education. “Most training environments are in lecture or book form, we take it a step further and put the emergency responder in an environment that builds confidence and their ability to perform.”

Courses range from a few hours to a few days in length and give students an opportunity that is hard to match elsewhere.

“Because of what we teach first responders, there is no substitute,” said Belser. “We train with the real nerve agents to instill confidence in the equipment they use, and give them the tools they need to perform during a disaster - either manmade or accidental.”

The students fondly refer to the nerve agent training site as “the COBRA”, which stands for Chemical, Ordnance, Biological, and Radiological Training Facility. The experience enables graduates to effectively prevent, respond to, and recover from incidents involving chemical weapons and other hazardous materials.

“The COBRA training facility was out of this world,” said John Williamson, a firefighter and emergency medical technician from Ohio. “This was the best training I have ever had in my 20 years of serving in the public safety field.”



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### **Responding through training (Cont.)**

“We don’t just teach from a manual,” said Mellione Richards, course manager for three core courses involving hazardous materials. She added, “To coin a phrase, they ‘train like they fight’, with actual toxins, using the proper equipment. Times are changing and our students want the training in order to be more prepared and to save lives.”

Although practical application with toxic agents is a highlight of some courses, classroom instruction offers expert advice from instructors and students alike who have served on the frontlines day after day in hometown America. The center uses the latest techniques and procedures and some of the best equipment available during the courses of instruction.

Instructors at the CDP must have a minimum of 10 years of operations experience to be considered for a position. Instructors come from various backgrounds, and are carefully selected, to prove credibility before students who may be in harm’s way at any moment.

“We want to make sure our first responders who train here have all they need to protect their communities and feel confident and prepared,” said Campeau. “We all want the nation’s emergency responders to have the capability to protect their cities, counties, and communities.”

At the CDP, training for state, local and tribal responders is fully funded by FEMA, a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Round trip air and ground transportation, lodging, and meals are provided at no cost to responders or their agency or jurisdiction.

In 2000, the CDP’s training delivery system expanded to include non-resident (mobile) training program and in 2001, the indirect (train-the-trainer) training program. The CDP has delivered 444,508 course completions since the CDP was established.

The non-resident training concept takes training to jurisdictions across the nation, featuring advanced, hands-on training provided to multidisciplinary audiences. In coordination with State Administrative Agency (SAA), the host jurisdiction provides the venue and the responder students—and the CDP training teams provide everything else needed to train. There are approximately 50 Mobile Training Teams spread across the nation each week featuring courses that are one to three days in length.

“No other federal training agency offers what the CDP does,” said Campeau. “Responders serve as the Nation’s first line of defense and deserve the highest quality training available. The instructors are some of the best in the Nation and come from a variety of emergency response backgrounds.”

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### **Responding through training (Cont.)**

The CDP provides America's emergency response providers with skills to manage incidents - making America a safer place. Preparing a nation to prepare itself and respond to emergencies are just a few of the goals accomplished each week.

"During my career, I have attended over 50 advanced police related training courses and this was the best presented," said Sgt. Frank Nunez, CDP student, from the Orlando Police Department. "The staff was superb in presenting the material and also ensured every student understood what was presented."

To learn more about the Center for Domestic Preparedness, visit <http://cdp.dhs.gov> or call 866-213-9553.

*FEMA's mission is to support its citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.*