



FEMA

LESSON LEARNED

Hazardous Materials Response: Obtaining Voice Amplifiers for Use with Personal Protective Equipment

SUMMARY

Emergency response organizations should consider obtaining appropriate voice amplifiers for personal protective equipment (PPE). Response organizations should provide personnel with appropriate training in the use of such devices.

DESCRIPTION

On May 3, 2006, the Orange County, California, Sheriff's Department and Transportation Authority conducted the Orange Shield full-scale exercise (FSE). The goal of the FSE was to assess the region's Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan and to demonstrate the ability of partner agencies to counter a threat to mass transit. One of the FSE objectives was to effectively control the scene environments to contain hazards and to maintain the safety of first responders and the public. The exercise simulated a hostile force commandeering a bus, taking hostages, and making a threat with a biological weapon. Representatives from 27 regional, county, and local agencies participated in the FSE.

Orange County's Joint Hazard Assessment Team (JHAT) was among the first units to respond to the hostage incident during the FSE. JHAT personnel donned PPE before entering the hot zone in accordance with their standard operating procedures. JHAT personnel communicated effectively with supervisors and other team members via radio during the FSE. However, they had difficulty communicating verbally with other FSE participants while wearing PPE masks. For example, as they removed hostages from the commuter bus, JHAT personnel found that the PPE masks muffled their voices and made it hard for the passengers to hear spoken directions.

Exercise evaluators noted that the passengers' inability to hear JHAT personnel could have prevented them from understanding potentially life saving instructions. The Orange Shield after-action report recommended that JHAT responders utilize voice amplifiers to improve their ability to communicate while wearing PPE during future incidents.

Emergency response organizations should consider obtaining appropriate voice amplifiers for PPE. Response organizations should provide personnel with appropriate training in the use of such devices.

CITATION

Orange County (CA) Transit Police Services. *Orange Shield 2006 Full-Scale Exercise After-Action Report*. 03 May 2006.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=25285>

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