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LESSON LEARNED

Hazardous Materials Response: Communicating an Alternate Decontamination Plan to Responders in the Hot Zone

SUMMARY

If an incident scene is deemed unsafe for a decontamination area to be established prior to responders' entry into the hot zone, hazardous materials (HazMat) personnel should communicate an alternate plan to response personnel operating in the hot zone as soon as possible. This plan should outline the alternate decontamination location and procedures for moving to that safe location.

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.

The operational plan for the FSE called for responders to enter the incident site, render it safe, and then contact the Orange County Fire Authority's (OCFA) HazMat unit to establish a decontamination area. OCFA's HazMat unit is capable of establishing an emergency decontamination station within 3 to 4 minutes through the use of pre-connected hose lines and tank water carried on fire apparatus. The Orange Shield after-action report (AAR) observed that the operational plan worked well for the purposes of the exercise. However, if a responder or civilian had required rapid decontamination during the initial operating period, HazMat personnel would have had to first identify a safe area for decontamination operations, establish a decontamination facility, and then broadcast its location to the victims. This process could have caused confusion and could have significantly delayed the treatment of contaminated individuals.

The Orange Shield AAR recommended that an alternate decontamination plan be communicated to responders in the event that a decontamination area cannot be established prior to the onset of response operations. This plan should identify the alternate decontamination site and include directions for moving to that location in a vehicle or on foot.

If an incident scene is deemed unsafe for a decontamination area to be established prior to responders' entry into the hot zone, HazMat personnel should communicate an alternate plan to response personnel operating in the hot zone as soon as possible. This plan should

outline the alternate decontamination location and procedures for moving to that safe location.

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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