

## **TERT Takes Toxic Approach to Emergency Response**

By Shannon Arledge, CDP Public Affairs

The Technical Emergency Response Training (TERT) course is considered one of the most unique courses offered at the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP) in Anniston, Ala.

TERT—one of several all-hazards training courses at the CDP—is one-of-a-kind training and is the only place in the nation where civilian emergency responders can train in an actual nerve agent environment.

This hands-on training experience takes place at the CDP's Chemical, Ordnance Biological, and Radiological Training Facility—the COBRATF. The TERT course enables responders to effectively prevent, respond to, and recover from incidents involving chemical weapons and other hazardous materials.

“The major attraction to TERT is the extensive hands-on training and the fact that responders perform tasks in a genuine nerve agent environment,” said Mellione Richards, TERT course manager. “It’s an operational level, performance driven course that provides responders with the skills necessary to respond to a real-world incident.”

“We provide our nation’s first responders with the necessary tools to go home and protect themselves, their family, and their community in a WMD all-hazards incident,” added Richards. “The TERT course is the foundation upon which several of the CDP courses are built.”

Rick Dickson, acting assistant director for Training Delivery, explained that the TERT course was an expansion of the CDP's original “COBRA Course” offered in the early years, following the CDP's founding in 1998. “The original COBRA course focused on more traditional response disciplines like fire, EMS, and law enforcement,” added Dickson. “The course was redesigned to afford the toxic training experience to traditional and non-traditional emergency responders, which includes emergency management, healthcare, public health, public communications, public works, and government administrative. The TERT course offers an opportunity to receive operational defensive training that’s necessary to respond to acts of terrorism.”

Modifications to the TERT course continued during the ensuing years to include response activities associated not only with terrorism but also all-hazards events caused by accidents or man-made disasters.

More than 10,000 emergency responders have trained in the current course since its inception in 2001. The course offers multiple disciplines from multiple jurisdictions an opportunity to not only train together, but a chance to gain a better understanding of each discipline’s capabilities, roles, and responsibilities in catastrophic events.

“The TERT course includes responders from [a variety of] response disciplines,” said Dickson. “What makes this course truly unique is the varying levels of experience, which may include a firefighter who is in the first years of service, to a nurse with more than 20 years of experience.”

The four-day course features more than 30 hours of training, and provides responders with experience operating in various levels of protective equipment. TERT also includes 3.2 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The CDP is an authorized provider under the International Association for Continuing Education and Training.

“Responders have an opportunity to experience multiple types of Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE)—Level B, using a self-contained breathing apparatus and Level C, using an air purifying respirator in several different scenarios,” said Kenneth Vinson, assistant TERT course manager. “Sometimes it’s hot, sometimes it’s cold, but very seldom is the temperature just right. The responders experience the challenges involved with using PPE and they receive a thorough explanation of how to operate the gear. At the end of the class, they feel much more confident with all of the equipment.”

In addition to classroom instruction, the TERT course provides students with important hands-on training that includes hands-on exercises. The all-hazards approach features a summary of the terrorist threat, potential targets, and chemical, biological, radiological and explosive hazards that may be used in WMD incidents.

“A responder attending the TERT course will receive an overview of CBRNE material, incident command systems and extensive decontamination operations. “They also receive instruction on mass casualty triage, improvised explosive devices, and search techniques,” Richards added.

“TERT is a complete, diversified course that ranges from an awareness level, a refresher level, or a very complex level for some responders” added Vinson.

Emergency response providers attending TERT leave their CDP training confident in their ability to perform in situations requiring emergency response. At the completion of the challenging course, the 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.

“The course exceeded my expectations,” said Lt. Stephen Weiler, a police officer from Illinois. “I feel very comfortable now attempting to provide quality response to a mass casualty incident. I really enjoyed [the COBRATF] and how we tested two separate agents. Police, fire, medical, EMS responders aren't ‘windshield’ tourists in the professions we serve. We are the ones who get out and get our hands dirty. Boots on the ground, hands on, in the middle of it all. The COBRA facility, and the [COBRA pin] as a reminder, is one of those places we love to be,” he added. “You can’t find the COBRA pin on eBay®. You earn them by successfully going through the CDP training.”

The TERT course serves as the bedrock for many of the 38 courses offered at the CDP. The center's training and curriculum staffs constantly review course materials to ensure CDP training is current and relevant, based on new doctrine, the changing threat, and the needs of the response community.

*The Center for Domestic Preparedness 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 is a vital component of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Preparedness Directorate. For additional information about training opportunities at the CDP, visit <http://cdp.dhs.gov>.*