Weapons of Mass Destruction First Responder Training at the Nevada Test Site

National Security

Introduction

The National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Site Office (NNSA/NSO) provides weapons of mass destruction (WMD) training to teach first responders to detect, prepare, prevent, respond and recover from terrorist acts through research, development, test and evaluation, training, and intelligence support activities. More than ten thousand first responders per year receive this highly-specialized training conducted on behalf of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Grants and Training.

Background

For 41 years, the Nevada Test Site (NTS) served as the nation's continental nuclear testing ground, creating unique radiological areas to provide realistic settings to prepare for radiological emergencies. This, combined with the natural evolution of the geography of the NTS - from mountainous to dry, flat desert terrain - create a variety of conditions ideal for training. Specialized radiological training was offered to first-responders at the NTS in 1999. The In the months following the attacks on 9/11, the U.S. declared war on terrorism and has taken action to improve our nation's ability to detect, prevent and prepare for acts of terrorism committed within the U.S. Some of the nation's most unique WMD training is conducted at the NTS, a large, restricted locale that provides a safe, secure laboratory and training venue.

Classroom training

Training first responders in a realistic operational environment is critical to prepare them both physically and psychologically for a WMD incident. First responders must attend rigorous classroom discourse interspersed with participation in elaborately detailed exercise scenarios. Classroom training provides fundamental knowledge about weapons of mass destruction and includes such topics as:

First responders learn to use and read radiation detection equipment in realistic settings.

- Fundamentals of Radiation
- Health Effects
- Recognition/Notification of Radiological Incidents
- Radiological/Nuclear Threat
- Terms and Units of Radiological Measurement
- Basic Operation of Analog Meters
- Detecting Contamination
- Determining Dose Rate
- Survey Techniques
- Analog Meter Review
- Basic Dosimetry Operation
- Analog Meter Evaluation
- Radiological Dispersal Devices
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Donning and Doffing
- Performing Radiological Decontamination
- Emergency Medical Considerations

Mercury Base Camp at the NTS provides an equipment facility, newly renovated housing to accommodate out-of-town first responders, and food services for 350 personnel. A new classroom facility can accommodate up to 200 trainees in classrooms equipped with video links to field exercise locations, enabling trainees in the classroom to observe, real-time, trainees in the field.

Exercise training

First responder WMD training is conducted in realistic environments through specialized scenarios that challenge students to apply knowledge and judgment imparted by experienced instructors and test directors. First responders strive to conduct radiological facility surveys, personnel surveys and vehicle surveys; and participate in scenarios that simulate an attack on a radiological transport and a terrorist safe house. Exercises are conducted in facilities that are unique and exclusive to the NTS.

The Transportation Training Area (T-1) in Area 1 of the NTS is a giant expanse of land strewn with various realistic transportation accidents - a crashed 737 airliner lies in pieces across the desert, as do helicopters and other small aircraft. Trucks, buses, and a derailed locomotive and rail cars add to the transportation accident scene to provide a unique training facility. T-1 is a site where several atmospheric nuclear tower tests occurred, resulting in low-level radiation in the surrounding soil. Monitoring radiation in the T-1 allows the students to observe the actual properties of radiation without harmful effects.

The Phoenix Facility, formerly used to test nuclear propulsion techniques, serves as an exercise training site. This industrial facility is used to simulate a terrorist safe house, in which first responders must utilize concepts and methods taught in the classroom under the stress and pressure of a realistic scenario.

Mobile Training Team

In addition to training facilities at the NTS, WMD training is provided off-site by a Mobile Training Team. The team conducts approximately 24-30 courses per year. The four-day training courses are held in major cities across the country and train approximately 200 students per course.

Funding

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Training and Grants is responsible for providing training, funding the purchase of equipment, supporting the planning and execution of exercises, and providing technical assistance and other support to assist states and local jurisdictions to prevent, plan for, and respond to acts of terrorism.

Funding is provided through grants made to state and local jurisdictions to prepare for incidents of terrorism involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive weapons and cyber attacks. Grant programs currently provide funds to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For more information on first responder training at the NTS, please visit www.nv.doe.gov.

For more information, contact:
U.S. Department of Energy
National Nuclear Security Administration
Nevada Site Office
Office of Public Affairs
P.O. Box 98518
Las Vegas, NV 89193-8518
phone: 702-295-3521
fax: 702-295-0154
email: nevada@nv.doe.gov
http://www.nv.doe.gov

National Nuclear Security Administration

National Security

DOE/NV - - 1115
March 2006