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Regional Agencies Participate In Anti-Terrorism Training

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OCEAN CITY – A highly respected research and training program aiding law enforcement agencies around the country in anti-terrorism preparedness hit the surrounding area last week thanks to a resort police captain.

The country's past became its present last week for many local and state law enforcement officials during simulated training sessions focused on terrorists, suicide bombers and hostage situations. Utilizing the long-defunct Tyson plant and offices in Berlin and the resort's Public Safety Building on 65th Street, special police, paramedic and firefighter units received approximately 50 hours of training last week geared towards handling national incidents, involving high-tech chemical bombs and other hazardous materials, which could potentially be used for destruction.

Ocean City Police Department (OCPD) Captain Kevin Kirstein, a part-time instructor at Louisiana State University (LSU), last Friday explained the training.

"Part-time I work for LSU. I teach for them, so I called and made some arrangements. It took about a year to bring this program here. We're very excited to have had the opportunity to host the program. We're just tickled to death that we were picked," he said. "They've been training all week. It's been great. This is a culmination of the week."

Kirstein valued the weeklong program at around \$100,000, which was paid through the Department of



Law enforcement officials are pictured at the Berlin Properties North of I-95 off Route 113 last Friday participating in anti-terrorism training drills.

Photo by Jacob Cook

Homeland Security.

"We had no expense of putting the training on, except some incidentals," said Kirstein.

It took some convincing, but after nearly a year of moving through the proper channels to bring the specialized program to the local area, Kirstein says, the training better prepares law enforcement for rare, but plausible, crimes. For example, one scenario dealt with a chemical agent scheduled to go off inside a building. The agent had to be disposed of safely as officers scanned for other materials, suspects and hostages at the scene. In full riot-type gear, outfitted with guns, masks, helmets and other advanced equipment, officer after officer piled into the building with specific duties. After the simulated threat was derailed, officers were scanned, washed and hosed down for

any hazardous materials, which could be detrimental to their skin and eyes.

"We want them to be able to work in environments where some of these agents have been released," he said. "The paramedics have to do a physical on them before they put the equipment on."

OCPD spokesman Barry Neeb, who supervised and participated in much of the training, mostly as a role player in the terrorist and hostage simulations, said the training is the first of its kind to be offered in the area. He also commended the professionalism, knowledge and real-life tactics taught over the course of last week.

"It's probably one of the best trainings of its kind in the country," Neeb said. "It's anybody's guess when an emergency like that could

occur. That's a very specialized training. To be perfectly honest with you, I hope they never use it."

Public Affairs Manager for the National Center for Biomedical Research and Training at LSU Jennifer Hughes this week said the specialized seminars, programs and training fall under a branch of the university, but they are not school funded. She said the department offers many different training sessions outside of the one locally known as their tactical operations course.

"Our training and research center is located on the Louisiana State University campus," said Hughes.

According to the program's mission statement, "The mission of the National Center for Biomedical Research and Training (NCBRT) is to help America prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from acts of domestic and international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and high-consequence events through teaching, training, technical assistance, and research."

The necessary training is not widely publicized, Hughes says, but community members should be proud of law enforcement officials being proactive and taking advantage of the courses offered.

"They're trained in being able to identify chemical agents like anthrax and other chemicals like that. It works out really well because they can learn by doing," Hughes said. "It works out really well and we're able to provide top-notch training to communities like yours. I think what [the local community] should know is that your local agencies are being very proactive."

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