

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S
TERRORISM PREPAREDNESS
A Special Supplement to Viewpoint

Q&A with the Chief

Topic: Preparedness

What new equipment has been secured that will help keep members safe while responding to terrorist threats?

We have made it a priority to provide our firefighters and EMS personnel with access to critical life-saving equipment and medications. Remember, your SCBA is considered to be the single best piece of protection available to any first responder in the event of an airborne chemical incident. To help ensure the personal safety of EMS members operating in the field, we have procured the MSA Millennium model Air Purified Respirator. The respirator, intended to be used as an escape mask in the event of an airborne chemical incident, has been fit-tested and distributed to nearly all EMS field personnel (see related article on p. 6).

To address specific incidents involving nerve agents (such as VX or sarin gas) or other toxins (such as cyanide), our Office of Medical Affairs has stockpiled antidotes in secured depots in each of the five boroughs—enough to adequately treat all of our members and thousands of civilians. The Fire Department's Bureau of Health Services has also secured stockpiles of medications such as Ciprofloxin and Potassium Iodide, which can help safeguard the health of our members in the event of radiological or biological (anthrax) incidents.

Our Fleet Services Unit has established depots of critical firefighting equipment (including Hurst tools and thermal imaging cameras) throughout the city in the event of a recall and/or citywide emergency. In addition, we have procured equipment such as RadAlert detectors, Level A Chemical Protective Clothing, a fully-outfitted spare rescue rig, a new collapse rig, and other specialized detection

and mitigation tools which will further protect our members in the event of one of these incidents.

There has been a lot of emphasis on smallpox this spring. Isn't smallpox just one of many biological threats?

Smallpox is a serious, contagious and potentially deadly disease. It is estimated that approximately one-third of smallpox cases are fatal. The deliberate release of smallpox by a terrorist group is regarded by the federal government as a real possibility, which is why they initiated the federal vaccination program for a small group of people who will comprise initial response teams. It is important to note that smallpox is one of the few infectious diseases that can be protected against through vaccination.

For these reasons we have begun to offer vaccinations on a voluntary basis to EMS, Special Operations Command and BHS—the people most likely to be involved in transport, mitigation or vaccination efforts. Members who volunteer to take the vaccine will not only protect themselves, but will enable the City to provide emergency services in the event of a smallpox outbreak. The vaccination program is now officially supported by the EMS and Fire unions.

Every FDNY member who elects to receive a smallpox vaccination must first attend a mandatory information session which provides background on the virus, the vaccination, and important aftercare precautions. We have increased the number of these mandatory information sessions offered in April.

The Department's smallpox leadership group continues to work in partnership with the City's Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control to ensure that our medical staff is up to date on all the latest information regarding the vaccine. Through the FDNY's Terrorism Pre-

paredness Taskforce, we are being advised by Colonel John D. Grabenstein—the architect of the U.S. Military's smallpox vaccination program—and Dr. Joshua Shemer, the former Director General of the Ministry of Health in Israel. These experts have overseen the successful vaccination of over 300,000 members of the U.S. military and first responders in Israel.

Are there any new training initiatives underway?

As you know, Haz-Mat training is the bedrock of the Department's terrorism-related training initiatives. All of our firefighters, EMTs and paramedics have been trained to the level of Haz-Mat Awareness. Currently, many members of our Haz-Mat unit have been trained to the level of Haz-Mat Specialist. Members assigned to our seven Squads, five Rescue Companies and ten EMS Haz-Tac units are all trained to the level of Haz-Mat Technician. Eight ladder companies have also been given specialized training in the use of Chemical Protective Clothing. We are now going to expand on this with our upcoming initiative to train 600 members from 20 ladder companies to establish special operations support ladder companies (see p. 4).

In addition, 70 Chief and company officers recently completed our Incident Management Training program. This training is critical because it will enhance our ability to respond to complex and large-scale incidents.

Is the Fire Department testing its ability to work with other agencies at large incidents?

In the past six months, we have conducted five full-scale drills with the Police Department, including terrorism preparedness scenarios and hazardous materials incidents. The most recent drill was on April 3rd at Yankee Stadium. At some of these drills we tested the use of interoperable communications in our operations,

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