



Hector Guerrero of the Rail Operations Center welcomes participants to "tabletop" emergency response exercise. Below left, City Fire Inspector Joe Gould makes a point to Sheriff's Lt. Gary Hayden and Sgt. Corey Fletcher. Below right, Abdul Zohbi, right, of Rail Operations Safety gives an urgent report to Dave Jackson, of the Rail Operations Center, and Rail TOS Davide Puglisi. PHOTOS: BILL HEARD



'Tabletop' Exercise Tests Interagency Emergency Response

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 18, 2001) The buzz of urgent discussions filled a large room at Division 20, Wednesday morning, as MTA, police and fire officials struggled to cope with a "life-threatening situation" on Metro Rail. It was only an exercise, but all 50 involved were taking their actions very seriously.

The three-hour "tabletop" emergency response exercise – a realistic situation in which operators and passengers aboard two trains experienced symptoms from an unknown substance – was conducted to test the reactions and interagency cooperation that would be required in the event of a real emergency.

"The exercise went very well," says Kathy Murrell, the MTA's Emergency Services coordinator. "We will need some additional exercises to help improve the coordination between the on-scene command post personnel and Rail Operations Control. You always learn from these exercises."

As the exercise progressed, LAPD officers and LA City Fire Department commanders worked together to simulate closing several subway stations, cordoning off streets and evacuating passengers. Fire officials outlined how passengers would be detoxified and treated while HAZMAT teams tested the atmosphere in the affected stations.

Rerouting imaginary buses

The exercise included Metro Rail operators, rail supervisors and train controllers who coordinated simulated operations and evacuation

procedures with police and fire officials. Representatives of the Bus Operations Control Center rerouted imaginary buses to handle rush hour crowds denied access to the trains.

Near the end of the exercise, with an swath of the central business district shut down and emergency response teams busily treating "victims," the participants were thrown a curve ball: a report that a man with a gun had hijacked a Metro Bus near MTA Headquarters. The LAPD immediately launched helicopters to track the missing bus.

Official observers gave the exercise high marks, noting the coordination among the various agencies and the degree of expertise that each group demonstrated in its area of specialty.

The tabletop exercise was planned by Hector Guerrero....Kathy Murrell, the MTA's Emergency Services coordinator, at the request Ralph de la Cruz and Jess Diaz of Rail Operations. Assisting at the exercise were Collins Kalu, Tom Eng, Linda Leone, Vijay Khawani, Evaluators were Battalion Chief Raymond Olsen and LAPD Capt. Sandy Wasson.

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