

When the chips are down...

Anti-terrorism exercise puts participants from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, fire and emergency services agencies, transit agencies and tenants of USG through their paces at Union Station.



Photos by Gayle Anderson

Anti-Terrorist Exercise Stressed Inter-Agency Cooperation

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(July 31, 2002) The scenario for an anti-terrorism exercise hosted by the MTA, Tuesday morning, was grim: A mid-afternoon explosion in the tunnel connecting Union Station and the East Portal kills and injures passengers and causes extensive damage to the rail complex.

Rail and bus service at Union Station Gateway is disrupted. Soon, other explosives are found. How should law enforcement, fire departments, emergency services and transit agencies respond?

For three hours, some 80 participants from 30 local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, fire and emergency services agencies, transit agencies and tenants of USG worked feverishly to answer that question.

As the scenario unfolded, phantom police, fire and emergency units were dispatched to the "disaster scene," Union Station and MTA Headquarters were "evacuated," while the MTA and other transit agencies scrambled to maintain rail and bus service, provided bus bridges and coaches to transport "evacuees."

"This...exercise is a good opportunity to test and evaluate our ability to respond in a fully coordinated, effective and timely



ROC Assistant Manager Doug Jackson and Rail Operations Controller Luis Canel help map out MTA response.

manner to a security incident," CEO Roger Snoble wrote in a memo to participants.

The crisis exercise was important because the USG transportation complex is the largest of its kind in the western U.S. It has been identified as "critical infrastructure" of national significance to the region's transportation system and economy.

"We had 80 people who were educated on what could happen in a real incident," said Paul Lennon, MTA chief of Security and Law Enforcement. "This was really a good exercise because it made the agencies that participated realize how dependent they would be on other agencies for assistance and expertise in a real incident."

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