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Hazardous Materials Training Planned for Metro Rail Staff

- Training in response to concern over mercury spill at Pershing Square station
- Sheriff's deputies interviewing possible witnesses to incident

(Jan. 19, 2007) The Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau (TSB) plans to launch hazardous materials training sessions within the next week or so for Metro Rail personnel.

The training sessions are being planned in response to concern voiced Thursday about a mercury spill, Dec. 22, on the platform at the Pershing Square station.

A video of the incident appears to show a man crouched on the platform, then dropping a vial of liquid which spills on the floor. Eight hours passed before the TSB was notified and cleanup of the spill began. Board Chair Gloria Molina has called for an investigation of the response to the incident.

When exposed to air under certain circumstances, mercury can be poisonous. No one was injured in the incident and the HAZMAT personnel who responded to the scene said the amount of mercury spilled was not enough to injure anyone.

Sheriff's detectives said Thursday there was no evidence to suggest the incident was terrorist-related or even of a criminal nature.

Talks by experts

Lt. Holly Perez, a Metro Rail watch commander, said Friday that the training sessions planned for Metro Rail employees could include a HAZMAT video and talks by experts from the Sheriff's arson and explosives details, the terrorist early warning group and the LA County Fire Department.

Previously, security training for Metro Rail personnel involved recognition of suspicious packages, powders and liquids and the proper response to possible terrorist-related incidents.

Following Thursday's extensive local and national press coverage and the posting of flyers in the subway, TSB deputies have been interviewing witnesses who may be able to provide leads to the man shown in the surveillance video, according to Transit Police Chief Cmdr. Dan Finkelstein.

Finkelstein said Metro Rail personnel at all levels should be trained to properly respond to incidents such as the mercury spill. "We need to think differently now than we did prior to 9/11 and before the terrorist

strikes in Madrid and London.”

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