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Metro Security Officers Training in Terrorist Threat Recognition

- 'I'm more alert and more aware,' says one trainee

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 15, 2007) In Anniston, Ala., last month, Metro Security Officer Carlos Pena climbed into a protective suit, pulled a hood over his head, strapped on respirator and stepped into a room full of deadly nerve gas.

Pena, along with classmates from Metro and a number of other "first responder" agencies around the country, were students at the Center for Domestic Preparedness where they received training in the threat posed by chemical, biological and radiological weapons.

"It was scary," Pena says of his experience in the chemical chamber. "But, it increased my abilities and awareness, and my confidence in myself and the protective equipment."

To date, more than 35 Metro security officers have attended the five-day "incident command" course at Anniston and 15 have participated in a four-day "train the trainer" course at New Mexico Tech in Socorro, N.M., that covers response to terrorist bombings.

Both courses are sponsored by the U.S. Homeland Security Department. In March, another contingent of security officers will attend a training course in Deming, N.M., in preventing and responding to suicide bombers.

Basic knowledge of WMD

"We're making sure our security officers have basic training as first responders and a basic knowledge of weapons of mass destruction," says Security Lt. Jacob Lopez, who coordinates the training program. "If our system comes under attack, the officers who likely will be the first responders will know how to set up an incident command post and will know how to recognize, avoid and isolate a threat and notify the proper authorities."

Security Sgt. Ty Henderson has attended both courses and is a Homeland Security-certified instructor. Participants in the classes he



Metro Security Officer Leroy Reed, above, and Senior Officer Harold Wilson, below, are recent graduates of the security programs. Reed completed a course at the Homeland Security Department's Center for Domestic Preparedness and Reed attended the Incident Command Course at New Mexico Tech. Photos by Ned Racine



attended included city managers, public works managers, fire fighters, police officers and others.

“We don’t deal with terrorist acts on a daily basis as they might in Israel,” Henderson says, “but we need to be ready in case one occurs. We also want to bring back current information from a trusted source like Homeland Security.”

Now, when he’s out on patrol, Officer Pena draws on the training he received during the WMD course. “I’m more alert and more aware of what could happen and how to provide assistance to the public. I’m sure that, with the right equipment, if I had to help the fire department or another first-responder agency, I could do that now.”