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Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

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► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/ Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Four trainees of the emergency operator training program stand with their instructors in the North Hollywood Red Line Station. Trainees were Tom Eng, Metro Safety Certification and Operations Manager; Battalion Chief John Quintanar, Los Angeles Fire Department; Sheriff's Lt. Nancy Iwata and Capt. Frank Espinoza, Los Angeles Fire Department. Behind the trainers are their instructors: Chris Medina, Linda Leone and Arnold Johnson.



Fire, Law Enforcement Personnel Train as Emergency Red Line Operators

- Metro is first in the U.S. to provide such training on heavy rail

By NED RACINE

(March 9, 2007) Preparing for grim possibilities, Metro trained four firefighting and law enforcement personnel in February to operate Red Line trains in case of a major emergency.

The four, including Battalion Chief John Quintanar of the Los Angeles Fire Department, attended eight hours of classroom training and eight hours training on the Red Line.

Metro is the first transit agency in the United States to train fire and law enforcement personnel to operate heavy rail, according to Quintanar, who coordinates Metro activities with the LAFD.

"[Riders] should care about [this training] because they are going to have first responders who can go in there and rescue them from the train," said

Quintanar. He noted that the fastest way of extracting people from a subway tunnel is by using a rail car.

Joining Quintanar for training were Tom Eng, Metro Safety Certification and Operations manager; Sheriff's Lt. Nancy Iwata and Capt. Frank Espinoza of the LAFD.

The two-day training class was provided by Linda Leone, Rail Integration and Instruction manager, and rail transportation operations supervisors Arnold Johnson and Chris Medina.

'We would handle the situation'

Quintanar stressed that fire and law enforcement personnel would only operate the rail cars to free Metro's rail operators from working in a dangerous situation. "[If] we had to go in there and rescue people, we would not put the operator in harm's way...we would handle the situation. That's what they are teaching us to do."

Trainers showed Eng, Iwata, Espinoza and Quintanar how to operate a Red Line train, couple and uncouple the trains and manually switch trains from one track to another.

Metro will train an additional 25 Los Angeles Fire Department personnel and 25 Sheriff's deputies later this year, Quintanar said. The fire fighters will train in mid-May and the Sheriff's deputies in June.

The additional fire personnel will be selected from eight stations in close proximity to the Metro Red Line route from Downtown Los Angeles to North Hollywood. The firefighters are members of hazardous material and urban search and rescue teams.

That would ensure eight emergency operators for each of three shifts at each fire station along the Red Line. Quintanar anticipates the training will be reoffered in two or three years with a refresher class given three times a year.

Quintanar, who spent five years driving a fire engine, found the training "a lot of fun." He enjoyed operating a train running at 55 to 70 miles an hour below Los Angeles.

"Hopefully, we'll never have to do this," Quintanar said.