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Handler Paul Orcutt challenges canine officer-in-training to find explosives stashed aboard a bus.
Photos by Gayle Anderson

Metro Security Stages K-9 Drill Training Exercise for Local Agencies

By LAURA KLOTH
myMetro.net

(Feb. 5, 2009) Though incidents involving explosives are rare on Metro's trains and buses, Transit Security officials know they can count on one handy resource, if necessary: trained canine companions.

Metro's four-footed assistants, who have achieved the rank of K-9 Officer, took part in a training exercise at Division 20 hosted by Metro Transit Security Jan. 20. Joining canines from other agencies, the Metro dogs sniffed and searched their way through luggage, buses, a building and a large shipyard container.

"I set up today's training so we can meet other agencies that we have in our area, and be able to count on their resources like they're able to count on our resources," said Senior Transit Security Officer Henry Solis.

"If anything were to happen at the Gateway building, we could actually get 20 dogs to come out and do a

Senior Transit Security Officer Henry Solis coordinated a multi-agency canine drill at Metro Red Line Division 20.



Here are some of the K-9 officers on the job:

search on the building because realistically we couldn't do it with three dogs," Solis said.

Metro currently has 16 dogs available, three that belong to Transit Security, and 13 that belong to Los Angeles Sheriff's Department deputies. And, if necessary, more dogs are available from agencies around the city and region, Solis said.

Solis works with a beautiful black 4-year-old male Labrador named Nakita, who has won trophies for his sniffing abilities.

"We try to set up (a training session) at least every four months," he said, noting it's a good way to evaluate strengths and share new techniques.

Participants included K-9 officers from the LAPD Bomb Squad, the FBI, Amtrak security, Riverside-San Bernardino and private agencies, including dog training guru Danny Lamasters, and Paul Orcutt, a dog handler who trains Disney's police hounds.

Metro's dogs are trained to find explosives or handguns and alert their handlers, explained Transit Security Officer Gus Lozano, who handles a Labrador aptly named Napoleon Dynamite.

During this training, a perky Labrador named Nitro takes only a few seconds to locate a small piece of cotton wedged inside a locker. The cotton contains a small amount of explosive.

Pointing to a list showing explosive materials used at the training, Solis said the dogs are trained to discover explosives from the size of a toothpick to a 1000-pound cache.



U.S. Marshals...



Western K-9 Consultants...



and the Palm Springs Police Department.



TSO Henry Solis points to hidden explosive in locker room. It takes Nitro only seconds to discover a matchstick-size explosive. TSO Gary Carney rewards Officer Nitro with a toy toss.

Nitro's handler, Transit Security Officer Gary Carney, responds by rewarding him with a rubber toy. Some dogs get food rewards but Metro's dogs get

toys, he said.

The dogs are drilled at least twice a week to keep their training fresh and familiarize them with various environments.

Officers also take the dogs through the trains and buses to conduct sweeps during peak periods, and familiarize patrons with them.

"We don't use the same training aides. Today it might be Palm Springs Police Department training aides. Tomorrow it might be Riverside's. We don't have the same spots," Lozano said.

Officers who handle the dogs train for three months with expert trainer Lamasters.

Carney said officers really bond with their dogs, and the dogs become a family pet during their working years and when they retire.



Handler Phil Clark puts Amtrak K-9 officer through the baggage inspection drill.