

FDNY's Preparedness--Second to None

In the past 18 months, we have acquired a great deal of equipment to address new threats posed by terrorism. Chemical Protective Clothing, RadAlert 50 radiation detectors, spare rescue apparatus and strategically located caches of equipment and medical supplies have all helped increase our level of preparedness, as well as ensure the safety of our members operating in the field.

Yet none of this equipment would be useful without adequate training and know-how, which is why our top priority at the Fire Department--and the cornerstone of our preparedness efforts--is an emphasis on training. We have, since 9/11, given every uniformed member of the Department at least eight hours of Terrorism Awareness Training, using a curriculum provided by the Department of Justice. RadAlert 50 training now has been incorporated into the FLSTP program for new Officers. Haz-Mat refresher training now is underway for all members of the Haz Mat, Rescue and Squad Companies. Eight Ladder Companies have been trained to use Chemical Protective Clothing and another 20 Ladder Companies are being trained as SOC Support Ladder Companies, capable of augmenting the Special Operations Command in a variety of heavy rescue and haz mat incidents.

The SOC Support Ladder Company training initiative is, perhaps, the best example of how our emphasis upon training has helped create a Fire Department prepared to contend with the unconventional challenges of this post-9/11 world. These specially equipped Ladder Companies will rely on their 40 hours of heavy rescue training and 40 hours of Haz Mat training to support SOC with resources and manpower, as well as greatly improve our lifesaving capabilities in contaminated environments. All 600 members of these Ladder Companies will be trained in haz mat monitoring, operations in chemical protective clothing ensembles and decontamination. They will be able to perform scene surveys of collapse and confined space incidents. And, if needed, these SOC Support Ladder Companies will respond as reserve units when Rescue and Squad Companies are otherwise unavailable.

Becoming a member of a SOC Support Ladder Company benefits not just the Department and the City it serves, but also those individual Firefighters and Officers who undergo the training. SOC Support Ladder Firefighters will be the first choice for details to SOC units needing staffing. They will be the first choice for overtime in SOC units if SOC is unable to hire sufficient personnel. Additionally, these specially trained Ladder Company Firefighters also are eligible to work overtime in "Hammer Teams" as needed.

More than 100 Firefighters and Officers already have completed this specialized training. In their post-training evaluations, all participating Firefighters and Officers gave the program high marks and many specifically mentioned its importance--especially now. The first 10 SOC Support Ladder Companies are slated to go into service on or about June 23, at which point, another 10 Companies will begin training. Once all 20 Ladder Companies go into service, they will populate all five boroughs.

The Department also plans to build upon the SOC Support Ladder Company initiative by training more Ladder Companies in the use of Chemical Protective Clothing, which will help our Fire Department become even more prepared to respond to any incident this City may encounter.

To honor the Fire Department's mission--its pledge to protect the people and property of New York City--we must be prepared for the challenges of today. We can only do so by learning about those challenges, planning for them and training to ensure that our plans will be successful. The training already has begun and it will continue indefinitely, because this Fire Department--and the City it protects--deserve nothing less.

