

Special Apparatus-- The Decontamination Unit

by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

Chemical releases, asbestos and biological terrorism are just a few of the non-fire situations that FDNY members must face and with which they must deal. Contamination of both firefighters and victims by any of these elements can have serious consequences. To handle such situations, the Department currently maintains two Decontamination Units, along with a Decontamination Support Unit.

The Department's first Decontamination Unit was a 1987 Mack tractor, pulling a Fruehauf trailer that was outfitted by the Shops. This apparatus was quartered with Ladder 15 in lower Manhattan. The trailer was replaced in 1995 by a new unit that was designed and built by SuperVac specifically for this purpose. Now designated Decon 1, this unit, when activated, is transported to the scene by members of Ladder 15, who are trained to deliver and set up this apparatus.

Decon 2 is a 1997 Modec trailer, pulled by a 1997 Ford pickup truck. This unit is quartered at the Fire Academy. When activated, either Engine 35 or Engine 83 is assigned to respond to the Fire Academy and transport Decon 2 to the scene of the operation. Members of these units are trained to deliver and set up this apparatus.

Both Decon Units are designed so that a contaminated person enters at one end. After the contaminated clothing is confiscated and bagged, the individual proceeds through the decon shower procedure. Finally, the person exits at the clean end after being issued disposable clothing.

Once either Decontamination Unit is at the scene of an operation and set up, the actual decontamination procedures are performed by members of one of the Squad Companies. If medical



Decon 2, a 1997 Modec trailer, is quartered at the Fire Academy on Randall's Island. It is transported by either Engine 35 or Engine 83.

all photos by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone



(Above) Decon 1, quartered with Ladder 15, is a 1987 Mack tractor, pulling a 1995 SuperVac trailer. (Below) The Decon Support Unit utilizes an apparatus assembled at the Shops. It is quartered at the Special Operations Command on Roosevelt Island.



triage or medical decontamination is required, members of the EMS Command will perform this function. The time required to decontaminate personnel varies according to the material involved, amount of contamination and consistency of the product.

To logistically support a decontamination operation, the Department also maintains a Decontamination Support Unit. This apparatus is quartered on Roosevelt Island and staffed by Special Operations Command personnel. It carries a supply of disposable replacement clothing (Tyvek suits, boots, gloves), respirators and filters, duct tape, hose, brushes, a portable power washer, a 5000-watt generator, electrical cables, decon vacuums, decontamination solution, bagging supplies, an inflatable tent and other necessary equipment to sustain this kind of operation. The Decon Support

Unit operates an apparatus that was assembled at the Shops, using a former 1983 Mack Satellite chassis and the body from a 1980 ComCoach Salvage truck.

Decontamination Units respond only by special call. Generally, this is initiated by the Incident Commander after consultation with Haz-Mat Technicians on the scene. When either Decontamination Unit is assigned to respond to an incident, the Decontamination Support Unit also will be assigned to respond.

About the Author...

Battalion Chief John A. Calderone has served the FDNY since 1973. Currently, he is working in Battalion 22. He holds a degree in Fire Protection from New York City Community College and has written extensively on the subject of fire apparatus. He is a regular contributor to WNYF.



Decon 2 is pulled by a 1997 Ford pickup.