

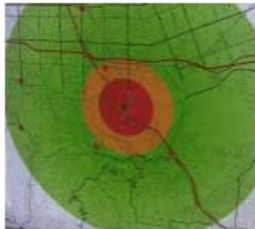
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**L.A. Nuclear Drill Tests Countywide HAZMAT System**

by Elaine Pittman on July 30, 2010

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Representatives from the largest operational area in the nation's third largest state gathered Wednesday, July 28, to participate in the mock detonation of a 10-kiloton improvised

nuclear device. As part of the drill dubbed Operation Golden Phoenix, Los Angeles County and its operational area — which includes 88 cities, 137 unincorporated areas and 288 special districts — promoted collaboration and relationship building while integrating sensor technology that supports interoperable data sharing.

Emergency operations centers in the L.A. area, including the county's and city's centers, were activated Wednesday morning to provide command and control operations in response to the detonation of the mock nuclear device in L.A.'s metropolitan area. John Fernandes, administrator of the L.A. County Office of Emergency Management, said exercises like Operation Golden Phoenix are important because they help to identify people's roles during an emergency and "expected surprises."

"There's a lot of unexpected surprises and expected surprises in a lot of ways because that's what emergencies are," he said. "Emergencies are going to give you expected surprises with respect to a certain number of casualties, a certain number of problems with reaching people who have problems getting water in the aftermath or shelter if they need immediate shelter."

Radiological events require different levels of planning because during a natural disaster, like an earthquake, there will be problems with hospitals being flooded with people. "But from a radiological situation, now you're talking about exposure, you're talking about spreading a lot of different things that can come in and increase the already chaotic havoc," Fernandes said.



**Photo:** Los Angeles County's Emergency Operations Center was activated for Operation Golden Phoenix. Photo by Paul Williams.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) sponsored Operation Golden Phoenix, but L.A. County led the exercise, said S&T Program Manager Teresa Lustig. "They selected the scenario themselves,

they wanted to choose this improvised nuclear detonation, which I think is the most challenging," she said. "They provided a lot of the training in advance to all of the participating jurisdictions on the scenario and how first responders should respond to these type of events."

Lustig added that the DHS mainly took on a facilitator role, but it benefited because the county adopted the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program, which allows quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of the response to the drill.

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## Data Interoperability Aids Drill

To aid information sharing during real-world events — from catastrophes to hazardous materials responses — the S&T has been working with the L.A. County operational area for about two years on a pilot of the Integrated Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (ICBRNE, pronounced "I C Bernie") System, a sensor system that monitors, reports, displays and alerts officials to detection of such materials. HAZMAT instruments used by first responders in the county's operational area stream information to the Internet, where officials and subject-matter experts can view it and work together to determine the appropriate response.

"What we were trying to do was take their existing equipment and existing information systems and use open standards and communications protocols to allow them to share that data and that information seamlessly with whoever needed it and with the right amount of information so they could respond appropriately," Lustig said.

The ICBRNE project began as a way to improve the safety of first responders going into hazardous environments, said David Lamensdorf, an ICBRNE subject-matter expert for the S&T. To detect chemicals and other hazardous materials, "They bring instrumentation ... with tiny little displays and trying to view this data out in the field can be a little bit challenging, especially as it goes through fogged up face masks and such," he said. To address problems like responders being unable to clearly see the instruments' screens and the need to provide interoperable data sharing, the ICBRNE System works with off-the-shelf sensors to wirelessly send live readings to subject-matter experts and other first responders a safe distance away from the hazardous materials incidents.

Lamensdorf, also the president of Safe Environment Engineering, which makes wireless data transmitters, said there are three parts to the ICBRNE System:

1. A Lifeline Interoperable Network Communicator (LINC) connects to the first responder's instrument and sends the raw data to a computer application that emulates the instrument's screen. This allows firefighters and other responders to see the readings from the instrument that the HAZMAT team has in the contaminated area without having to relay the findings verbally over the radio.
2. A gateway allows the data to be transmitted over the Internet. The gateway takes a local-area network and puts it onto a wide-area network, which allows people not at the scene to view the information online.
3. The data is transmitted through global standards so it can be shared using the agency's tool of choice. "If a response organization has a specific tool display mechanism they want to view the data in, as long as it can work to these standards, it can take the data and present it," he said. "We like to think we've created a common-operating picture of data; everybody's working off the same data."

Although the technology is complicated, Lamensdorf said when he was working with first responders on what they needed, it was important to them that it should be simple to activate and use. At the scene of a possible hazardous materials response, to get the ICBRNE System running for first responder use: "One switch turns it on, there's one icon on their desktop to get things loaded, and then embedding it, part of the standards, just happens," he said.

The ICBRNE System was used during L.A. County's nuclear drill to provide a common operating picture to all the participating agencies. And through the use of the DHS' evaluation process, Lustig said the S&T will receive a report card of how effective the ICBRNE System was during the exercise.

Wednesday's nuclear functional exercise was one part of Operation Golden Phoenix, which also included tabletop exercises, workshops, communications exercises and an after-action conference that will be held on August 25. L.A. County's Fernandes said continual training is key to ensuring that people are clear of what their roles are during real-world emergencies.

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I didn't see the scenario, but I assume this would be a ground blast. I don't think EMP would be a major issue, but may affect a very small area. LA City and County are quite large. Some system outages could be expected but I think lots of useable and actionable readings could be collected.

From Freddie M. Bell August 03

What about the EMP?

From Ed McGinley August 03

The ICBRNE sounds great. How would it fare from the EMP in this scenario?

From Kelly King August 03

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