

DHS Adopt NFPA Standards for HazMat Incident Response

Vision has played an important role in the recent update of the WMD/Terrorist Incident Defensive Operations for Emergency Responders (WMD Operations) curriculum. On September 3, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) adopted the newest standard, NFPA 472, Standard for Competence of Responders to Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction Incidents, 2008 Edition, the version which will be taught during the WMD Operations (Per 212) course after final review, hopefully by the end of this year.

Training Officers have been preparing for adoption of the new standards for about a year and many plan to update all personnel. With the grant-funded WMD Operations program available for delivery across the United States, the requests for courses are on the rise. Training dollars are scarce in many jurisdictions and the DHS grant-funded training is especially appealing, with the added bonus of certification through the National Professional Qualifications System (NPQS/ProBoard) as a HazMat Operations-level responder offered with the course. Today's Training Officers are looking for certifications rather than training for their personnel, keeping an eye to the potential for other grant funding that may require personnel to meet National competencies.

The alignment between the DHS and the latest NFPA 472 standards is great news for the WMD Operations program, since it is a DHS grant-funded program. This added consistency and standardization supports the goals of the WMD Operations course which provides training using innovative teaching methods. Curriculum revision staff have been working really hard to go the distance to update the world-class training program for first responders. Truly the first of its kind, this "on-the-road" course is three days and focuses on the unique personal protection challenges that responders face during a WMD/terrorist incident or a hazardous materials incident. With miniature props, abundant personal protective equipment (PPE), and mobile training devices, the WMD Operations course is now based on NFPA 472 (2008) consensus standard operations-level core competencies and PPE mission specific competency, OSHA (29CFR 1910.120) and EPA (40CFR Part 311) response regulations. And again, the opportunity for a National level certification is unique for such training.

"In today's world, all first responders need a strong foundation in hazardous materials awareness and response, whether the incident was caused by accidental release or by an act of terrorism," said Jeff Gore, Training Manager of the WMD Operations Program. "If we properly prepare our first responders, they are better equipped to recognize and handle dangerous situations and minimize the threat to the public in the event of a catastrophic incident."

The new standards of the profession, the revised curriculum in WMD Operations, and updated skill training will be even better measures of first responder knowledge, because they reflect a professional consensus on important subject content and standardization across the United States.

“We must continue to provide training of the highest quality to recruit and prepare current and future first responders so that they are knowledgeable in matters of terrorism and hazardous materials, are professionally prepared, and are committed to the mission.”