

The Virgin Islands Consortium

J.F.L. Staff And Firefighters Receive Training To Manage Hazardous Materials

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ST. CROIX -- Since Tuesday, firefighters here and employees of the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center, have been receiving hazmat training to be able to correctly manage hazardous situations and also to properly respond to events such as terrorist attacks, if they were to happen.

The event, which ends on Friday, was provided free as a partnership between the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Texas A&M University Engineering Extension Service.

J.F.L. Incident Command and Director of Clinical Operational Performance Improvement, Angeline Ravariere, said once training ends, hospital employees would have the same capabilities to ensure that when patients exposed to hazardous materials visit the facility, "we don't contaminate the hospital, but are able to treat the patients safely." Participants will also be nationally certified and have continuing education credits (CEUs) for licensure as well as college credits upon completion. A similar training will be held next year, according to Ms. Ravariere.

She said the hospital had been working on making this training available to employees for quite some time, but the high costs delayed the effort. J.F.L. departments involved include emergency room, dietary, materials management, patient advocate office, hospital safety, quality management, risk management, security, housekeeping and maintenance.

Irvin Mason, training coordinator for V.I.T.E.M.A., instrumental in organizing the event, stressed the importance of assuring that the territory's two hospitals are always ready to treat all patients.

"We have to get the hospitals ready because we only have one here and one in St. Thomas. And if they ever get contaminated, we're completely shutdown," he said. "So the employees need to know the right procedures in case of a hazmat situation."

The Fire Service's Deputy Chief of Training, Antonio Stevens, who said that designated employees had already received hazmat training, stated that this week's event serves as a refresher. New firefighters are also part of the weeklong class, as well as Fire Service supervisors who Mr. Stevens said needed to be trained to adequately lead their squads in hazmat situations.

"If you respond to a fire and when you get there you see green smoke, you need to understand this smoke is not normal," Mr. Stevens said. "Something is wrong and it might be a hazmat situation, so they immediately need to know that they can't proceed any further and need to start evacuation, for example."

V.I.T.E.M.A. Director Mona Barnes spoke briefly on Wednesday, urging participants not to see the training as merely another check on their resumes, but rather knowledge that could come in handy at any given time. She said the notion that terrorist attacks could not take place in the territory because of our location and seeming disconnect with national matters, is dangerous.

"Because of the area and the nation that we're living in and what you're seeing happening around us, you might say today, 'this is stupidity; this is never going to happen to us in the Virgin Islands.' I want to tell you that you can't have that mindset. Anything can happen at anytime," Ms. Barnes said. She alluded to a call she received from 911 concerning a hazmat situation in St. Thomas yesterday, connected to a swelling drum with a substance that was unidentified at the time.

"We can't take anything for granted," she warned. "My hope and my prayer is that what you learn here today that you never have to use it, but if you do, at least I know there are 48 of you in this class and we're going to tap you."

[View the original embedded media](#)

Feature Image: Malik Griffin being suited by hazmat instructor Alen Russell. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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