



Photo by Jennifer Compston

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Mock Disaster Begins Today

By Jennifer Compston
Marshall County Bureau Chief

Mock Disaster 2002, "Answering the Call," gets underway in Moundsville today with first responders from throughout the Northern Panhandle expected to participate.

Opening ceremonies are set for 9 a.m. today at the Moundsville Center at the former West Virginia Penitentiary, and Chief Mark Zambanini of the Sipesville Fire Department in Somerset, Pa. will serve as the keynote speaker. Zambanini was instrumental in coordinating local, state and national rescuers in July, when nine trapped coal miners were successfully extracted from a Pennsylvania mine.

Also, a representative of Gov. Bob Wise's office will be on hand to help kick off the event – the first of its kind held at the site on Jefferson Avenue.

As a prelude to the event, however, Dane Pitarresi of SKIDCAR SYSTEM, based in West Linn, Ore., visited Moundsville on Thursday and Friday with training devices that were demonstrated to and tested by local police and firefighters.

The SkidCar System consists of a wheeled frame and hydraulic dolly on which a vehicle is mounted. Drivers can then rely on this frame to keep their vehicle from overturning as they perform high-risk maneuvers in an effort to learn correct driving techniques. This system allows police, firefighters and other emergency personnel to experience the real physical forces that can cause an accident while greatly reducing the risk of accident or injury. This gives drivers an opportunity to learn to deal with or avoid such situations.

Robert D. Coburn, training manager for the National Corrections and Law Enforcement Training and Technology Center located within the Moundsville Center, said local officials are considering the purchase of a SkidCar training device.

"This is consistent with our commitment to excellence in training," Coburn said.

Several local firefighters on Friday had an opportunity to test drive a truck similar to a fire engine while utilizing the device. Learning what not to do behind the wheel were Joe Spong of the Moundsville City Fire Department, Rich Krizan of the Benwood Volunteer Fire Department, and Burnie Yoho of the Wheeling Fire Department. Each of these "trainees" said this was a rare opportunity for them, and they added they found the device to be a useful training tool.

Local police officers had a similar opportunity to drive a car mounted on the SkidCar device Thursday. SkidCar Systems range in price from about \$40,000 for a SkidCar platform, instructor training and spare parts kit to as much as \$120,000 for a SkidTruck and Tractor platform, instructor training and spare parts kit for use with large vehicles like fire trucks.

Pitarresi will be on hand throughout the weekend to allow Mock Disaster participants additional opportunities to examine and test the SkidCar System for themselves.

As the Mock Disaster gets underway today, the focus will be on the talents of area first responders and their ability to contain and identify chemical substances, preserve crime scenes, provide medical treatment, decontaminate the affected area and people, and to alert the media and surrounding residents with accurate, useful information.

Participants will have an opportunity to attend training seminars, where they will learn about evidence collection, protection of food and water supplies, weapons of mass destruction, chemical awareness, law enforcement response to terrorism and working with the media during a crisis.

On Sunday, area first responders will be faced with a mock disaster scenario, based on a fictional terrorist attack at a large public gathering. "Patients" will be treated at the scene and at area hospitals, giving medical facilities a chance to rehearse for a real-life crisis

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