

## Fort Bend officials participate in test of emergency skills

■ Fake scenario had 2 explosions, botulism outbreak

By JOHN PAPE  
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

A group of 120 local government officials, police officers, firefighters, emergency medical personnel and others took part in an emergency response and recovery exercise designed to hone their skills in handling a real disaster.

The emergency scenario, which involved a widespread outbreak of botulism and two explosions in a local shopping district, was designed specially for Fort Bend County by the National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center. The training was sponsored by the Governor's Division of Emergency Management.

Saying he was pleased with the response and positive atti-



BRAUN      TREVINO

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—JEFF BRAUN

Fort Bend County emergency management coordinator

tude shown by participants was Fort Bend County Emergency Management Coordinator Jeff Braun.

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SUZANNE BEHAR FOR THE CHRONICLE

**LOOKING AT ISSUES:** Participants in the training drill included Gary Gazaway, left, superintendent, Needville Independent School District; Kay Sword, clinical manager, emergency services, Memorial Hermann-Katy Hospital; and Kevin Kress, deputy chief/paramedic, Fort Bend County Emergency Services.

## PRACTICE: Agencies in Fort Bend try to get ready for 'real' disaster

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ing relationships between our various entities. Relationships built today at the exercise will make for a more effective disaster response in the future," Braun said.

The purchase of emergency equipment such as digital radios and mobile incident command posts has greatly enhanced the safety margin for county residents in the case of a disaster, either man-made or natural, he said.

Rescue Training Center officials visited the Fort Bend area in October to gather information needed to design last week's exercise.

"This was not a cookie-cutter approach. Everything was tailored for Fort Bend County," Braun explained.

Dallis Warren, assistant police chief and emergency coordinator for Rosenberg, said the exercise helped participants refine their skills for a multi-agency response to a disaster.

"The driving force of the day was to figure out how to gain control of the incidents presented; figure out who needs to know what so response can be coordinated countywide; determine what resources are needed and how quickly; and, when necessary, learn how to request assistance from higher levels of government," Warren said.

In the exercise, participants were split into six working groups. Each group was presented with initial information that law enforcement officers had located maps and building plans of various facilities during

a raid of an extremist group's headquarters.

The groups then were told that the Department of Homeland Security had upgraded the threat level to Condition Orange. That information led each group to conclude that a credible terrorist threat existed in Fort Bend County.

Discussion in each break-out group revolved around the challenges of mobilizing resources and personnel, as well as coordinating the flow of information. As the exercise continued, participants received additional information.

Training center officials praised the exercise and the quality of the emergency responses they saw.

"This was one of the largest regional coordination exercises ever held in the state of Texas, and all participants are to be commended," said Karen Wilcox, exercise program coordinator for the NERRTC. "Though representing many different agencies, the participants worked as a team to successfully overcome the disaster scenarios presented to them."

Tom Felts, program manager for exercises and simulations for NERRTC, said, "As a result of this exercise, Fort Bend County has strengthened working relationships and is better prepared to operate on its own during a disaster before other state or federal support arrives.

"Fort Bend County is aggressive and very professional in pursuing training opportunities such as this," Felts said.

Raul Trevino, an instructor

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program manager for exercises and simulations for National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center.

for NERRTC, had a unique perspective on the exercise. He is a former Sugar Land firefighter who was involved in the development of that city's emergency management plan.

"The group did a great job. Jeff (Braun) has brought this team together and the results were very impressive," Trevino said.

The Nov. 8 exercise was the latest in a series of training sessions aimed at preparing Fort Bend emergency personnel for potential disasters.

"We had a functional exercise in May 2004, and then additional bioterrorism training in May of this year. We always learn from these exercises so we're fully prepared when a real disaster occurs," Braun said.

He credited the training for helping the county deal with Hurricane Rita earlier in the year.

The NERRTC will issue a report in three to six months, Felts said, to be used as a guideline to further refine the county's emergency response plan.