



New Jersey Office of Homeland Security & Preparedness **NEWS**

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For Immediate Release
September 7, 2006

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Metro Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Strike Team

Fact Sheet / Questions and Answers

Who is on the Metro USAR Strike Team?

The Metro USAR Strike Team is made up of nine fire departments from Bayonne, Elizabeth, Hackensack, Hoboken, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson as well as the five-municipality North Hudson Regional Fire and Rescue Agency. Members also include New Jersey Transit and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey police officers. The team's full complement counts approximately 500 members. The nine departments are drawn from the six counties (Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union) and two cities (Jersey City and Newark) participating in New Jersey's Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI). Operated regionally with oversight from the State Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the UASI program is federally funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and designed to help protect the country's urban areas most prone to potential terrorist attack.

Why Was the Strike Team Created?

One of the major objectives of New Jersey's UASI program is to enhance the security of the transportation sector — bridges, roadways, tunnels, air and sea ports, waterfront, freight and passenger railroads. Prior to the UASI program, the only statewide capacity to respond to large-scale technical events, such as building collapses, tunnel rescues, train accidents, etc., resided with the state's USAR team, New Jersey Task Force 1 (NJ-TF1), coordinated by the State Office of Emergency Management and the New Jersey State Police. The Metro USAR Strike Team was created to provide regional capacity to effect large-scale technical rescues in the densely populated northeast portion of New Jersey and to complement the capabilities of NJ-TF1. The individual Metro USAR Strike Team members are also called upon regularly to do rescue work and respond to incidents throughout the region.

What Makes It a Team?

Members of the nine participating fire departments and the participating police officers all train together and are provided with equipment that is uniform across the group. The Strike Team's nine heavy-duty fire/rescue vehicles and other equipment are interchangeable. This allows all the companies to share resources and back each other up in the event of a large incident. The Strike Team's equipment is also identical to NJ-TF1's and team members also train with the

Metro USAR Strike Force Q&A/2

state USAR team. All the participating companies have signed mutual aid agreements and are available to respond throughout the region, the state and even across state lines. The Elizabeth Fire Department serves as the central dispatch agency for requests for mutual aid to the team.

The team, task force and regional approaches have been embraced by New Jersey's metropolitan UASI region, with its numerous municipalities of differing sizes that could be overwhelmed by a large-scale incident requiring rapid response from law enforcement, emergency medical services or urban search and rescue.

To that end, in addition to the Metro USAR Strike Team, the state and UASI region have developed an Emergency Medical Services Task Force to provide medical services during large-scale catastrophic events. They have also created a Law Enforcement Rapid Deployment Force to provide rapid response capabilities for the law enforcement community in the region. The force counts approximately 1,000 police officers from 135 municipal and county law enforcement agencies in the six-county UASI area, as well as a contingent of New Jersey State Troopers.

The New Jersey UASI program has taken a regional and team approach since its inception in 2003, when the first round of UASI funding was designated by the federal government for Newark. Subsequently, Jersey City was funded by the UASI program in 2004. Officials of both cities and the state agreed that a strategy that stressed regional approaches and mutual aid would offer the greatest protection for New Jersey's citizens in the northeastern part of the state. This past January, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff announced that federal funding for the 2006 UASI program would stress regional approaches, in effect validating the approach that New Jersey had adopted three years earlier.

What Kind of Training Does the Metro USAR Strike Team Get?

Strike Team members receive a minimum of 120 hours of targeted training in structural collapse rescue, trench rescue, confined space rescue and rope and rigging. Training is coordinated by the State Office of Emergency Management and the State Police and has been given at the Lakehurst headquarters of NJ-TF1. In addition, three contingents of team members have completed 40 hours of training at the Center for National Response in Standard, West Virginia, where they participated in a transportation tunnel rescue exercise simulated in a mine tunnel.

How Is the Strike Team Funded?

The Metro USAR Strike Team has received approximately \$11 million for equipment and training out of the \$63.2 million total that the New Jersey UASI program received in federal homeland security funds distributed by the state during the three years from 2003 to 2005. The nine heavy-duty fire/rescue vehicles cost approximately \$500,000 each. Staff salaries are the responsibility of the participating agencies. Other major UASI program expenditures from 2003 to 2005 include \$11.3 million for regional fire decontamination and response (foam caches, air cascades, fire vessels, other specialized equipment), \$8 million for training and equipment for the Law Enforcement Rapid Deployment Force, \$2.6 million for training and equipping the Regional EMS Task Force, \$11.2 million to improve regional communications interoperability and \$7.65

Metro USAR Strike Force Q&A/3

million to beef up physical security, or “target harden,” various “hard” and “soft” potential terrorist targets, such as water resources, New Jersey Transit facilities and shopping malls. New Jersey’s UASI was allotted \$34.3 million for 2006, and these funds will be used to continue these and other projects.

What Is Distinctive about the UASI Region?

New Jersey's UASI program provides a regional approach to security that is being modeled statewide. Spanning 1,164 square miles — more than 15 percent of New Jersey's total square mileage — this six-county metropolitan area has a population of 3.8 million, which is more than 44 percent of the state’s total population. The area also incorporates many core elements of New Jersey’s transportation infrastructure, including the George Washington Bridge, the Holland and Lincoln tunnels, the Ports of Elizabeth and Newark, the New Jersey Turnpike/Interstate 95 and Garden State Parkway, Amtrak’s northeast rail corridor, Newark Penn Station and Newark Liberty International Airport. The area is also dense with chemical manufacturing plants and other critical infrastructure.

To date, the UASI program, which is governed by a regional working group in coordination with the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, has focused on spending grant funds to enhance security in the following areas:

- Transportation infrastructure
- Chemical/drug Manufacturers
- Shopping malls, sports complexes
- Water reservoirs and distribution systems, water treatment and dams
- Healthcare facilities and hospitals

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