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FEMA URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (US&R) NY-TF1 TEAM CONDUCTS RE-BREATHING EXERCISE AT FDNY TRAINING FACILITY ON RANDALL'S ISLAND

US&R exercise tests team's ability to use re-breather equipment in live disaster scenario

December 4, 2019 — The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) New York Task Force 1 (NY-TF1) US&R team recently concluded an intense two-day exercise at the FDNY training facility on Randall's Island. The unprecedented US&R exercise, conducted December 2 and 3, tested the team's ability to effectively utilize re-breather apparatus during an intense disaster simulation that included both a subway tunnel explosion and a collapsed pile rescue. This full-scale exercise marked the first time re-breather equipment has been tested under the FEMA US&R system. A re-breather is a breathing apparatus that absorbs the carbon dioxide of a user's exhaled breath to permit the recycling of unused oxygen of each breath. Oxygen is added to replenish the amount metabolized by the user.

"The re-breather equipment offers our task force members unique capabilities during a disaster. Our elite men and women are constantly exploring ways to sharpen their skills, and this intense exercise is a reminder that they are striving to be the best first responders they can be," said **NYC Emergency Management Commissioner Deanne Criswell**. "Our team is ready to answer FEMA's call to help anyone in need during their most difficult times."

"I cannot think about our Urban Search and Rescue teams and not feel a tremendous sense of pride and gratitude to the 18 teams that helped New York City get through [the tragedy of] September 11th, 2001. Now my position at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allows me to see the entire 28. The first live exercise of our re-breather capability is just another example of how the commitment, expertise and dedication continues to grow," said **FEMA Regional Administrator Thomas Von Essen**.

"New York Task Force-1 (NY-TF1) is comprised of elite members of the FDNY and NYPD, and this team is a tremendous asset not only to our city, but the country as well," said **Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro**. "The Department is proud to host this important re-breather exercise at the FDNY Training Academy because we know the skills practiced here will further improve the safety and preparedness of the NY-TF1 members when they are deployed to rescue others."

"Exercises like these hone our crisis-management plans and lifesaving skills and keep our dedicated team prepared to respond wherever disaster strikes," said **NYPD Chief of Special Operations Harry J. Wedin**.

Under the guidance of task force leaders from FDNY and NYPD, 90 NY-TF1 team members and four canine teams (one handler and one canine per team) — in collaboration with FEMA and NYC Emergency Management — participated in the two-day exercise dubbed "TunnelEx." The

team members, who are trained in tunnel rescue and certified in using re-breather equipment, conducted search and rescue operations in a subway tunnel engulfed in smoke following a simulated attack. The goal: test the usage of re-breathers for a minimum of two hours in an emergency scenario. The team also deployed canine search teams to conduct search operations on a collapse pile to rescue victims, who were played by New York City Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members. Additional exercise objectives included transportation of personnel and cache, mobilization, and the establishment of a base of operation, equipped with a water distribution system, and sanitary/shower units. Following the exercise, the teams de-briefed and de-mobilized the base of operation.

About US&R and NY-TF1

The FEMA US&R program originated as a response system for natural disasters. It consists of 28 teams strategically located throughout the United States. These teams are deployed within six hours of activation. Since the program's inception, the task forces have broadened the scope of US&R's work. Two early activations of the US&R system occurred in response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and the 1994 Northridge earthquake in California. FEMA US&R teams also activated in response to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, Haiti earthquake in 2010, and a number of recent hurricanes in the U.S.

Urban search and rescue involves the location, rescue (extrication), and initial medical stabilization of individuals trapped in confined spaces. Structural collapse is most often the cause for people being trapped, but individuals may also be trapped in transportation accidents, mines, and collapsed trenches.

Urban search and rescue is considered a "multi-hazard" discipline, as it may be needed for a variety of emergencies or disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, storms, tornadoes, floods, dam failures, technological accidents, terrorist activities, and hazardous materials releases. The events may be slow in developing, as in the case of hurricanes, or sudden, as in the case of earthquakes.

The US&R NY-TF1 team is sponsored by the New York City Emergency Management Department and is made up of specially trained personnel from the FDNY and NYPD. NY-TF1 deployments include Hurricanes Ike and Gustav in 2008, the Haiti Earthquake and Hurricane Earl in 2010, Hurricane Matthew in 2016, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017, Hurricane Florence in 2018, and Hurricane Dorian in 2019.

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