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Top right: Lt. Bob Bartholic and Lt. Mike Moore decontaminate themselves after handling an unknown substance.

Bottom right: Capt. Kevin Kirkland briefs Lt. Mike Moore on the situation before they enter the building.

Facing page top: Lt. Bob Bartholic.

Facing page left: Lt. Bob Bartholic and Lt. Mike Moore exit the building that contained a simulated hazardous substance.

Facing page right: Key points people should look for when they receive suspicious mail.

Photos and story by Christie Vanover



Firefighters protect Fort Riley residents from biohazards

Less than one month after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America was again struck by an act of terrorism: Anthrax.

Letters containing the hazardous substance killed five people in Florida, New York, Washington, D.C. and New Jersey in 2001.

Although the letters didn't reach Fort Riley, Kan., its Fire Department was prepared to take every reported suspicion seriously. Within days of the public's awareness of the contaminated letters, Fort Riley officials had responded to half a dozen local reports of suspicious packages, all of which were false alarms.

"After an incident there is a heightened sense of awareness for events that could cause injury to mass numbers of people," said Capt. Kevin Kirkland, Fort Riley Fire Department. "As a result of that, the fire department started paying attention to finer details when responding to an incident, looking around being more suspicious."

"In our job, along with military police and other people who respond to emergency activities, it's to the point where it's harder to trust common events. There is no normal. Everything is assumed to be a worse case scenario," he added.

advancements

In the past year, the fire department has advanced its hazardous material response capabilities by purchasing state-of-the-art biohazard detection and protection equipment.

"We identified what we could use to better protect the installation," said Kirkland. "Most of it revolves around helping the individual and getting quicker access, quicker answers to what's going on."

The new equipment includes a portable machine that will distinguish traces of five hazardous substances within 15 minutes, including anthrax and plague.

training

During a recent training exercise, crews tested the new equipment as they reacted to a report of a suspicious substance in a Main Post office building. After receiving the call, four fire trucks, an equipment trailer and more than a

dozen firefighters reported to the scene.

Lt. Bob Bartholic and Lt. Mike Moore, were called to duty. After their vital signs were checked, the firefighters put on class B encapsulated suits, self-contained breathing apparatus, gas masks, gloves and boots. Although the suits are lightweight, they are airtight, and temperatures can rise to 120 degrees inside within minutes.

"Inside the suit there's no outside air that gets into it. We're breathing through a self-contained breathing apparatus. It's very hot," said Bartholic still sweating after the exercise.

The crew took nearly an hour to assess the situation and properly prepare their team members who were going to be exposed to the unknown.

"Unlike a fire, this is slow and deliberate. We don't rush," said Lt. Michael Keating.

When Bartholic and Moore were ready, they donned their masks, entered the building and located the simulated suspicious substance.

The two swabbed the substance and put it in a water solution to prevent it from becoming airborne. "When it's in water, it's contained," said Bartholic. "That way we can take it back out safely, decon the exterior bags and then they can run the tests on it and find out exactly what we have."

Once the item was contained and triple-bagged, the two exited the building and went through a decontamination shower. The substance was then handed off to another firefighter and brought into a truck to be tested with the bio-hazard detection instrument.

the equipment

"The instrument is biological just like a pregnancy test," said 1st Lt. Brenda Rudyk, chief of environmental health with preventative medicine services. "The antigen is set onto the plate and then once the solution is poured onto that, it interacts with that, and that is what the instrument is reading."

"There are two lines. The one line is the control line and the other would basically tell you if you have a positive or not. A UV lamp reads it and it basically measures the color intensity. That gives you your reading whether it's positive or negative," she added.

The fire department trains on a reg-

ular basis with military police, special response units and agencies within the community on terrorist related activities and hazardous material response.

"Obviously, the more times you train, the more times you perform something the less likelihood there is that something might go wrong, so that's why we go through these exercises. We train and sweat and go through all this just so that we can ensure that our safety and other people's safety is held at the utmost," said Kirkland.

what to look for

In addition to training, the department's new equipment will help ensure the safety of on-post residents, by determining hazardous substances expeditiously.

Within the past year, the department has responded to 22 reports of suspicious packages or letters, however, they have only had a handful over the last six months. "They have diminished as people become more aware of what to look for," said Kirkland.

He explained that suspicious letters include those that are from strangers, those that have a handwritten address with no return address or something that's unusual that recipients don't see as being appropriate.

However, he also stated that the likelihood of "John Doe" receiving something that would be a bioterrorist activity is pretty rare.

While Fort Riley's fire department is the first in the region to obtain this state-of-the-art portable equipment, its first priority is to protect the installation before it can assist outside communities.

"We do have prearranged agreements between the installation and the outside communities that allow us to respond and assist," said Kirkland. "If for some reason we were requested to assist a community that does not have a mutual aid agreement with us, then



they would need to go through a procedure where they contact the installation and then request our services. At that point in time, the commanding general and the garrison commander, would make the decision as to what we're able to assist with."

loss of brothers

While Sept. 11 led to improvements in the department's technology, it also affected firefighters personally.

"We all lost 383 brothers," said Keating. "Firefighting is a very close-knit group. We face the same kinds of danger as if you're in New York City or in Fort Riley, Kan. We face the same dangers all the time."

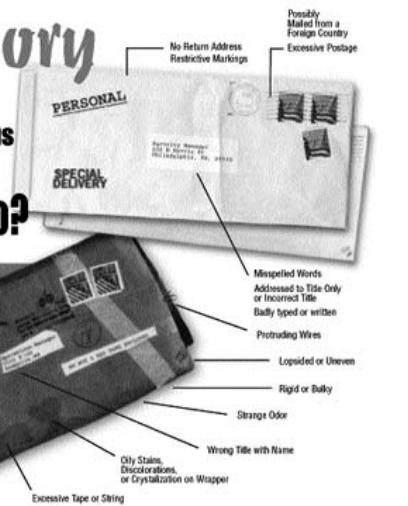
"We lost a lot of firefighters and personnel during 9-11," said Bartholic. "That's hit everybody. It's always in the backs of our minds now. Does that change how we do our job, no. We do our job as safe as we possibly can to make sure everybody goes home when it's time to go home and we go the extra length to make sure everybody goes home. Whether it's a victim or one of us who may have gotten injured, we go the extra length."

FBI Advisory

If you receive a suspicious letter or package

What should you do?

- 1 Handle with care Don't shake or bump
- 2 Isolate and look for indicators
- 3 Don't Open, Smell or Taste
- 4 Treat it as Suspect! Call 911



If parcel is open and/or a threat is identified...

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| For a Bomb Evacuate Immediately Call 911 (Police) Contact local FBI | For Radiological Limit Exposure - Don't Handle Distance (Evacuate area) Shield yourself from object Call 911 (Police) Contact local FBI | For Biological or Chemical Isolate - Don't Handle Call 911 (Police) Wash your hands with soap and warm water Contact local FBI |
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