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The Region

Staged Terror Gets Their Act Together

A mock attack near Simi Valley helps 300 public safety workers prepare for the real thing.

By **AMANDA COVARRUBIAS**
Times Staff Writer

More than 300 Ventura County public safety workers responded to a mock explosion and train derailment Friday near Simi Valley in a staged act of terrorism meant to help prepare them for the real thing.

The 10 a.m. drill involved an explosion in a container car carrying napalm and C-4 explosives, which were being shipped by rail through Simi Valley by terrorists, said Julie Frey, a spokeswoman for the drill.

The staged explosion was part of a Defense Department training exercise called "Determined Promise 2004," which is testing responses to simulated terror attacks nationwide.

A similar exercise was held Thursday at the Port of Los Angeles.

Emergency crews from 27 agencies — including the FBI, Ventura County Sheriff's Department, the American Red Cross and the Ventura County Emergency Operations Center — participated in the five-hour exercise.

During the drill, about 30 Boy Scouts from Simi Valley played victims, lying in an empty field under the sun until firefighters arrived. They bore real-looking

wounds on their arms, legs and faces.

"If they do this again, they should not do it in the sun," said Nick Henry, 14, of Troop 626. He played a burn victim and had to wear a plastic mask over his face for the first hour.

"It was awesome," Nick said of the experience. "Just being in an ambulance with an air conditioner was good. And we met some cool firemen too."

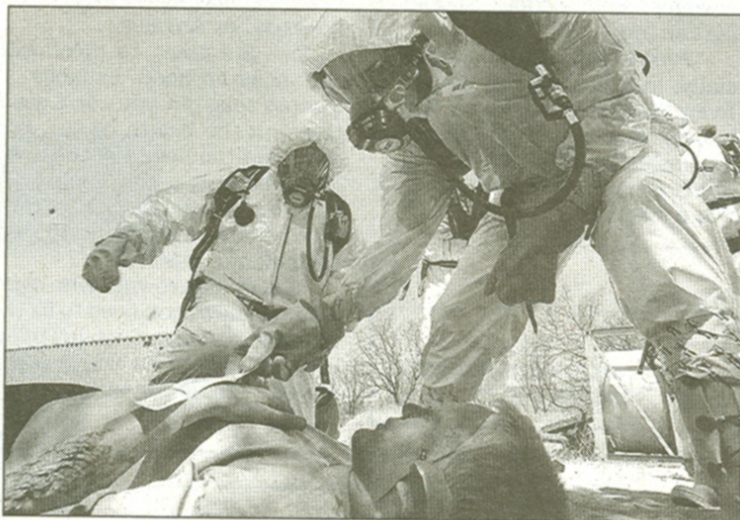
Although the boys did not earn merit badges for their efforts, they said they didn't mind participating. "When I first heard about it, I thought it was going to be boring," said Ryan Mace, 16, of Troop 698. "It's good practice, but I'm not sure Simi Valley is someplace that will be attacked anytime soon."

In the scenario, the Scouts had camped in Oak County Park the night before and were hiking near tracks when the train exploded and derailed.

Although 30 boys played victims, the explosion was supposed to have injured about 300 people, Frey said.

"We are so pleased with the way it's going," Frey said about two hours into the exercise. "Everyone did their jobs really well. They showed up and went to work. They knew what their assignment was and they knew what to do."

A debriefing was scheduled after the drill, but it was closed to the media. Frey said officials did not want potential terrorists to know what their weaknesses might be.



DRESS REHEARSAL: Public safety workers in hazardous materials suits examine Steven Page, 13, who played a victim.



DOCUMENTING THE DRILL: A TV crew tapes Sheriff's Deputy Jeff Hill, one of about 300 public safety workers involved.



WALKING WOUNDED: Steve Sardoni, 15, who played a victim of a mock explosion and train deralement, is helped by rescue workers as journalists cover the drill. Emergency crews from 27 agencies participated in the five-hour exercise, part of a nationwide series of tests. Photographs by SPENCER WEINER Los Angeles Times



AUG 6 2004



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