

Drill prepares IRSC cadets for real emergencies

Students train with Treasure Coast 1st responders

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FORT PIERCE, Fla. - A bomb explodes behind the Vernon Smith Public Safety Education building. Police and fire cadets cut through the smoke, ready to take action. They're on the hunt as two people in a minivan crash into a building and take off running. More cadets race inside to rescue the victims. Yards away, a team of fire cadets hose down a car that exploded in a fireball, making sure it won't flare up again. It's all part of a drill the school is conducting with cadets and law enforcement and fire agencies from around the Treasure Coast, but everyone knows it could one day be the real thing.

Academy director Larry Lawson said the students are taking what they've learned in the classroom to work directly with their instructors and real first responders. More than two dozen cadets participated.

"It solidifies what you've learned," he said. "It helps you become more efficient in actually practicing your profession."

"Can I get a BOLO (be on the lookout) on a silver Chevy Astro van with dark tinted windows?" Cadet Matthew Brewster requested on his radio.

Brewster is the incident commander and is learning first hand what it means to be in charge and making the decisions on how to handle the scene of an emergency. He said he was excited to use what he's learned at school.

"Do you feel that there's any more threat that the fire might start back up?" he asked firefighters.

"Not that we can see, no," replied one. "The fire's out."

Instructors said one of the most important things the drill teaches students is how to work together, with each other and with different agencies.

"The more that we work together from the ground up, the better we cooperate in the field when a disaster does occur," explained Lawson. "We're more efficient and we do what we do best: save lives and property."

More than just training, taking part in the drill is giving students more passion and confidence in what they do.

"They learn that they probably have skills they didn't realize they had," Lawson added. "They learn that they can do what they didn't think they could do and most important, they understand what it takes to be in the public safety profession."

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