

## National Guard trains newest Civil Support Team hopefuls at Indian River State College

By Nicole Rodriguez

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FORT PIERCE — The Treasure Coast hosted the Florida Army and Air National Guard as they conducted their final training Tuesday to become the nation's newest Civil Support Team.

Held at Indian River State College's Public Safety Training Complex, trainees donning orange HAZMAT suits responded to a hypothetical terrorist group known to have access to chemical and biological agents, among other exercises.

"The team is practicing how to respond to situations dealing with suspicious objects and chemical, nuclear or biological substances," said Bryan Beaty, the complex's marketing coordinator. "The teams will also be working with very expensive equipment."

Trainees arrived at the complex bright and early, and were expected to work well into the wee hours of the night.

"We've been out here since 9 a.m.," said Lt. Col. Joe DeFee of the 48th CST. "Today they're conducting a reconnaissance mission, marking doors, using video cameras and identifying chemical substances."

"If we're lucky, we'll be out of here by 11 p.m. or midnight," DeFee joked.

The 22-member team is in its final stages of extensive training. If certified, they will become the newest members of Florida's second CST stationed out of the Clearwater area. The team is dubbed Florida's 48th CST.

The state's first CST, named the 44th, is stationed out of the Gainesville area. Trainees have endured more than 600 hours of training during a two-year period.

Weapon of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams deploy rapidly to assist local first responders and the FBI in determining the nature and extent of an attack or incident. The federally funded teams aid in identifying and containing WMD's and help provide expertise and skills to keep citizens safe at high-profile public events and during emergencies that threaten the nation's security. They are a vital element of the

Department of Defense's overall mission to provide civil authorities with support in the event of an occurrence involving weapons of mass destruction in the United States.

Civil support teams across the country have assisted in such disasters as Hurricane Katrina and the events of Sept. 11.

"As part of Florida's 44th Civil Support Team, I participated in the anthrax mission in Boca Raton," DeFee said, referring to the 2001 letter attacks that killed five and infected 17 others.

And if the Gulf oil spill calls for the team's support, they'll be there.

"We haven't been tasked for the oil spill yet," DeFee said. "But if we are called, we'll be there to help."

Trainees will be back at IRSC Thursday to complete training. They will know by February if they made the team.

Florida, California and New York all have two support teams per state. The rest of the country's states have one support team apiece. CSTs go through the recertification process every three years. They practice reconnaissance missions regularly to stay in top form.

Indian River State College hopes the CST will utilize the school's state-of-the-art facility sometime in the future.

"We're hoping this will grow into an ongoing partnership with the Department of Defense, when they go for their recertification," Beaty said.



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