

Preparing for the worst 'what if'

BY JOSEPH RYAN

Daily Herald Staff Writer

If a 747 smashes into a Hoffman Estates subdivision, or a tornado rips across Schaumburg, it will take a lot more than local police and firefighters to save lives.

School officials, public works crews and emergency responders from several suburbs will need to play a role in the rescue and recovery effort.

That reality has sparked police departments in both towns to start training for catastrophes — natural and man-made — with other local agencies.

For three days this week, Schaumburg police officers, Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211 and Northwest Suburban High School District 214 officials and Hoffman Estates police and fire officers and village leaders acted out emergency response plans in a special seminar.

They made some mistakes, and, by many accounts, learned a lot. Oftentimes, they got it right.

"This is so we are prepared to handle everything that happens in this community," Hoffman Estates Police Chief Clint Herdegen said.

The 23-member class took two full days of class work and videos on topics like setting up command posts, identifying the "hot zone" and allocating resources such as fire trucks and public works crews.

Thursday's final exam was a two-hour simulation. In one room of the Hoffman Estates police station, instructors set up a scale model of a city, and Hoffman Estates police Sgt. Tom Sullivan stood over it with a walkie-talkie to radio the emergency scenario to the command center in another room.

Class members in task groups such as "logistics" and "planning" reacted and worked under a joint fire-and-police command that made the final decisions on how to respond.

Thursday's scenario started out as a school bus accident in which seven children were injured and the bus knocked over a tanker truck carrying toxic acetone. But apparently that was too easy.

As the drill marched on, the instructors ramped up the pressure. The acetone produced a toxic cloud that crept over a nearby elementary school of 500 kids. Later it turned out the tanker was driven by criminals who ran into a nearby apartment that might hold



MARK BLACK/DAILY HERALD

Dave Adelsberger from BowMac Educational Services works with Hoffman Estates police Sgt. Tom Sullivan on Thursday during a training session.

bomb-making materials.

Leading the course was Vincent Faggiano, a retired Rochester, N.Y., police commander and an instructor for BowMac Educational Services. He gave the group an overall grade of B. Perhaps the biggest problem, he said, was a common one: communication.

Gary Steiger, Palatine High School principal, said the drill showed him the importance of being involved early on with police and fire.

"We all have to work

together," he said. "And we can really help each other out."

Faggiano, who peppered his lectures with an animated New York accent and anecdotes from his own experiences, said it is better to screw up in a drill.

"This all about not having to learn lessons the hard way," he said.

This was the fifth such course in three years Hoffman Estates has put on, but it is the first to involve other towns and schools. The course costs \$600 per person.