



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The Eugene HazMat team puts on a educational demonstration for members of the media on May 28.

HazMat from A1

Central Oregon, including Cottage Grove.

Team members receive 160 hours of specialized training to the technician level and are equipped to provide different levels of response, including petrochemical highway incidents and supporting other responders at biological, radiological and explosive incidents.

Teams also provide outreach training to local responders and industry officials to ensure communities are prepared to respond to a hazardous materials incident and create safer communities.

"Cottage Grove is really good from a HazMat team standpoint," said Markus Lay, Eugene-Springfield Fire Battalion Chief. Lay assumes control of the region's HazMat team as well and conducts outreach which is mandated by the State Fire Marshall's Office.

"On a two-year basis, we go out and we meet with each one of the first responding agencies," he said.

Lay recalled a few instances when the team has been called to the Cottage Grove area, one involving a rolled truck and a chemical spill.

"That was about seven years ago and we shut I-5 down," he said.

Then, five or six years ago, Lay said he and his team responded to a Cottage Grove situation in which a

gun shop which had just moved out of town left behind a large amount of material used to enhance gunpowder. "And it was unstable. So, we came down and took care of that," he said.

However, HazMat teams are not called in for clean-up jobs, Lay said. His team works more toward neutralizing and isolating problems.

"We don't do cleaning," he said, explaining that usually a third-party cleaning company comes in and the cost gets passed on to the spiller. "We mitigate the emergency so there's no longer a threat to the community and then we make sure it gets passed on to the correct agency."

In rural areas, this can often involve drug labs.

"In 1989 when the team was first set up, that's almost all we did," said Lay. "We were doing meth labs and drug labs of all kinds."

And for a regional response team about the size of Lane County, situations tend to be rural.

"A lot of our calls are for an unknown substance. So that's usually our largest challenge, is figuring out what it is," Lay said. "It could be Windex. We don't know."

Among the team's newest technology is laser spectrometry, which allows responders to find out what a random fluid on the ground might be.

"That's probably one of the big-

gest technological advances that I've seen in the last decade," Lay said.

Previously, the task of identification was often simply a process of elimination with a "tacklebox" of tools.

"We could prove what it wasn't," said Lay.

The region's team acts as a consultant and technical resource for local incident commanders as well.

"On a daily basis, we do phone consults," said Lay. "If somebody doesn't want all of this (the rig and equipment) rolling up, but they're just like, 'I'm not sure what to do here,'... they'll call me and say, 'Hey, I have this truck. It's having this problem.' If there's no risk, I can guide them through it."

Lay encouraged city officials to call his team with situations they're uncertain about. "We'll answer those questions for them or help them out or point them in the right direction," he said.

Lay added that he prefers to offer a service rather than take command. "We're just a tool — we're not there to take control," he said. "To your readers out there, I just want them to know that we're here, we're a resource for them and make sure and use us."

Incident commanders can request a RHMERT consultation or response through the Oregon Emergency Response System at 1-800-452-0311.

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