

# Lights, Camera ... Toxins!?!?

## Hermiston HazMat team performs live drills

By JESSICA POLLARD  
STAFF WRITER

Test tubes and dangerous spills took center stage at the Umatilla County Fire District Training building Thursday, when the Hermiston Hazardous Materials Response Team ran several drill scenarios.

For the first time in about a decade, the National Guard's 102nd Civil Support Team — based in Salem — were in town to host the drills and provide training to Hermiston HazMat.

"Our hazmat team tried to get drills (with the 102nd CST) in the past, and it's been a logistical issue," said Lt. Matt Fisher of the Umatilla County Fire District, who organized the drills. "They have a lot of other obligations."

The role of the 102nd CST, according to the Oregon Military Department, is to detect, analyze and contain nuclear, biological and chemical incidents in the state. Each responder must undergo 800 hours of training.

Of the 13 HazMat teams that make up the Regional Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Teams (RHMER) in Oregon, Hermiston's addresses emergencies all across northeast Oregon. If the team requires extra help or more specified technology, the 102nd CST would come from Salem to help.

"The drills the 102nd CST put on are second to none," Fisher said. "(They are) as realistic as we can come up with."

Much of the CST's work involves responding to reports of clandestine labs producing narcotics or methamphetamine around Oregon. Their specialized mobile lab has the ability to identify a diverse variety of



Lt. Matt Fisher, center, demonstrates how to use a HazMat 360 infrared spectroscopy to firefighter Matt Lewis, left, and Lt. Jeff Armstrong on Thursday while training in Hermiston. The infrared spectroscopy, which uses a laser to determine chemical compounds, is a valuable tool for firefighters responding to hazardous materials incidents.

Staff photos by E.J. Harris



Firefighters, from left, Matt Lewis, Lt. Jeff Armstrong, Josh Smith and Jeremy Grazier look over video taken during a HazMat training exercise Thursday with the Umatilla County Fire District 1 in Hermiston.



A firefighter shows off a piece of equipment during Thursday's drill.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

hazardous materials, from drugs to explosives.

Drills like Thursday's are important opportunities for the CST to identify the limitations and specific methods of HazMat teams across Oregon, according to Tony Bernabo. This way, when they respond to a crisis with another team, they can tai-

lor the response to the specific area.

It's also an opportunity for the teams like Hermiston HazMat to become acquainted with newer HazMat technologies. A robot used to assess scenes before entry was rolling around outside before the drills Thursday morning.

The first scenario that the 102nd CST designed for the team involved a lab that may have looked like it was manufacturing illicit drugs, but was actually being used to manufacture explosives.

HazMat team members entered the site two at a time, first to assess the scene, and then again to bring in the

equipment needed to analyze and identify hazardous materials.

Each time a responder exits the "hot zone" — the site of the toxic event — they must leave their analysis substances aside and head to the decontamination zone to be washed accordingly, explained Bernabo.

When the team re-entered the site, they brought several sensors for radiology and gasses, as well as a device called the HazMatID 360, which looks like a digital record player, but is actually an infrared spectroscopy system that uses a laser to analyze and identify hazardous materials through a massive archive.

According to Fisher, the HazMatID 360 can identify chemical compounds down to the brand. The district hopes to upgrade their HazMatID 360 to a more portable recent version at some point.

The second scenario involved a power outage and toxin extractions from plant matter. The job of a HazMat team, Fisher said, is not to clean up the mess but to identify and contain the hazardous materials in order to protect people and the environment.

Depending on their conditioning, responders can usually remain in Level A HazMat suits, which have oxygen tanks, for up to an hour and 30 minutes, according to Capt. Phillip Troy of the 102nd CST.

The Hermiston responders all hold other jobs — from paramedic to firefighter — when they aren't responding to the estimated 10 calls that happen each year across northeast Oregon.

"We wear many different hats," said Fisher.

Although the team still has large quarterly drills and bimonthly trainings, Fisher said this can make scheduling trainings quite tricky.

For the Hermiston HazMat team, around 80% of situations are traffic-related, including the most recent incident out of Stanfield a few weeks ago when a truck leaked 5 to 10 gallons of diesel. The other 190 gallons were contained by the team, which drilled into the tank and pumped out the diesel.

# Hermiston's first family of auto racing

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
STAFF WRITER

As with so many days on the track, Bill Kik and his family were racing against time.

The family had assembled at the Kik compound north of Hermiston to take pictures for this story, but the dark clouds gathering above the property portended another late spring rainstorm.

The photo shoot averted disaster and Bill retired to his house, where he went over old pictures that helped tell the story of the neighboring property: the Hermiston Raceway.

Charlie and Pat Kik had kept meticulous scrapbooks filled with photos and newspaper clippings of the local racing scene and the development of the race track, and as their son Bill leafed through their pages, memories and old names started to come back to him.

Bill's passion for racing was handed down from his parents, who developed the Hermiston race track after watching an auto race in Pilot Rock and envisioning the possibilities by their property just off of Highway 395, where Bill and his family still reside.

The track opened on April 30, 1967, as The Umatilla Speedway and it quickly built renown.

Bill said a TV crew from the Tri-Cities was on hand when Sheridan Dietz, a racer from Pendleton, got into a vicious crash. The collision briefly appeared in the opening montage of "ABC's Wide World of Sports" before the program's switch to color caused the producers to cut the footage out of



The Kik Family racers are, from left, Linkin Zamudio, 10, Jose Zamudio, Ray Whitbeck, Neena Kik, Bill Kik, Jose "Pickles" Medina, 14, Justus Zamudio, 13, and Brody Whitbeck, 10.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



Bill Kik drives his Kik-Along sand drag racer in Salt Lake City circa 1980.

Contributed photo

the intro.

Bill added that stunt performer Evel Knievel stayed at the Kiks' property when he performed in Eastern Oregon, and driver Tom Sneva raced in Hermiston before going on to win the

Indianapolis 500 in 1983.

But in the early years of race track, there was one person audiences never saw participate in competitions: Bill Kik.

Although he participated in obstacle racing, sand

drag racing, and hill climbs, Bill said his dad wouldn't let him race on the track because he thought it was too dangerous.

He dropped racing as a hobby in the 1980s as he and his wife Bonnie raised their three daughters — Neena, Desirae, and Chelsea — and he worked his day job at Sanitary Disposal.

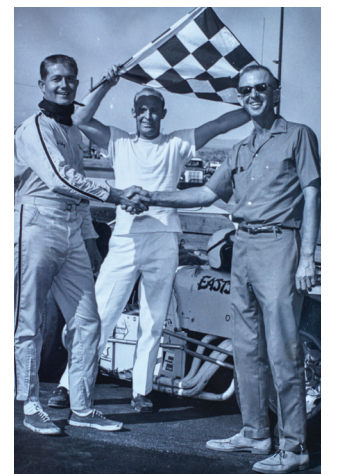
But Bill caught the racing bug in 2010 when he won a race track raffle that garnered him a legends car, a race car with a replica motorcycle motor.

"It's a bad, bad disease," he said. "It takes you hook, line, and sinker."

Bill not only got himself hooked, but spread his rekindled passion to his

daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren.

The track has long since passed out of the Kiks' own-



Contributed photo

Charlie Kik, right, congratulates racer Ken Hamilton, left, after Hamilton broke the track record on Sept. 17, 1967. Also shown is Bill Jones.

ership and its name has changed multiple times.

Bill said he helps out at the Hermiston Speedway where he can, but he and his family race at the track about a dozen times per year.

At 63 years old, Bill is sometimes asked when he'll hang up his fire suit, but he has no plans at this point.

"Not 'til he's done having fun," Bonnie said.

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