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NTTC Initiative Meeting the Technological

By Robert Reid, Public Affairs Manager, and Steven Infanti, Vice President of Public Affairs, National Technology Transfer Center, Wheeling, West Virginia

The National Technology Transfer Center (NTTC) is keeping America's emergency responders—firefighters, paramedics, law enforcement, hazmat teams, and others who serve on the front line in crisis situations—safe on the job through its Emergency Response Technology (ERT) program.

The ERT program, established through funding from Federal Emergency Management Agency and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, identifies commercial off-the-shelf technological solutions that meet the prioritized needs of the emergency response community. When those needs cannot be met by existing technologies available on the market, the NTTC works with federal laboratories, universities, and private industry to find solutions through research and development projects.

"The program is in place to put new health- and safety-related products in the hands of emergency responders, and this is an opportunity for us to evaluate, in a very realistic situation, the performance of promising technologies that have the potential to help save lives," says Mike Lucey, ERT program manager.

The foundation of the ERT Program is the ERT Advisory Group, an elite group of expert emergency managers from 10 of the most notable fire and emergency management organizations in the United States.

"The NTTC's ERT program is a multifaceted program that has been instrumental in identifying new technology needs for first responders," says Steve Morrison, executive director of the National Corrections and Law Enforcement Training and Technology Center (NCLETTTC) in Moundsville, West Virginia, and a 35-year veteran of law enforcement, corrections, physical security, and public safety. "While the program is best known for its work with firefighter and emergency products, it has also worked diligently to cover the law enforcement community. As a former police chief, I am gratified to know there are professionals such as [those at] the ERT program out there working for us."

The NTTC's capabilities in homeland security in particular were national news recently when it assisted Safety Solutions Inc. of Boynton Beach, Florida, in the commercialization of the HazMat Smart-Strip, a chemical-detection "warning badge" that immediately alerts emergency responders of a hazardous environment. Printech, a printing business in Wheeling, West Virginia, is manufacturing the technology as well as M-8 paper, the U.S. military's chemical detection gear that recently received a redesign to make it more user-friendly in the field. Safety Solutions and the NTTC played a role in the redesign.

The strip, about the size of a baseball card, identifies eight categories of chemical products. When one of these liquid or aerosolized products comes in contact with the reagent strip, the strip instantly changes color, allowing the responder to seek shelter, evacuate or decontaminate. The NTTC developed the prototype and assisted throughout the commercialization process, including identifying potential manufacturers and helping in their bidding process.

"The NTTC is proud to be home to a national program focused on keeping safe the men and women who put their lives on the line everyday to protect us. It is exciting for me to see that the program played such a role in bringing this exciting technology to market," says NTTC President Joe Allen.

The ERT program focuses on identifying technologies that potentially meet needs. If a solution is promising, the technology is referred to the ERT Group for validation. Once the group validates the technology as applicable, the NTTC assists the developer in planning for commercialization and moving from prototype technology to affordable, operationally suitable product.

"The assistance the ERT program has given us has been overwhelming," says Safety Solutions' Mike Reimer, an active hazmat responder with 17 years of experience as a hazardous materials technician. "Our focus was to provide emergency response professionals with a product that is reliable and one that can have a significant impact at an emergency scene. Without the ERT program, we would not be able to move this product to market."

Recognized by the U.S. Department of Defense as an appropriate forum for identifying defense technologies and equipment that can be readily put to civilian use by fire service and the emergency response community, the ERT program provides end-user feedback at the earliest phases of the research and development process to expedite the commercialization process. It also offers third-party evaluation and operational suitability testing of products to validate effectiveness in real-world applications. In fact, NTTC received accolades for its actions during a recent nationwide crisis management exercise.

ERT program officials participated in the Top Off II exercise, held May 15 in Chicago. Top Off II united the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Defense Department, and other agencies in an effort to assess the nation's capability through federal, state, and local responses to a challenging series of terrorist threats and acts. ERT program officials evaluated specific technologies and the performance of participating emergency responders.

"Top Off II brought tremendous opportunity to test our statewide plan, challenge a number of new procedures and realistically apply some cutting-edge technology. The ERT program officials provided valuable resources and staff, and they assisted in the evaluation and field-testing of the technology." says Jay Reardon, fire chief of Northbrook, Illinois, and a Top Off II organizer.

One of the many highlights of our visit was the successful testing and evaluation of the TerraSIRch SIR 3000 barrier-penetrating radar, a casualty location and assessment system. In the scenario, a building exploded, creating a large masonry and steel pile. The technology was able to locate live "victims" buried in rubble during the exercise.

For more information on the NTTC and its ERT program, call 800-678-6882, or visit www.nttc.edu.

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