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Specialized Delivery

Modec builds 25 multifunctional hazmat units for MABAS



By Bob Vaccaro

MABAS, the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System based in Illinois, recently took delivery of 25 state-of-the-art Modec decon units. This unit is built on a Freightliner 4300 chassis.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY MODEC

Interoperability, standards of operation, incident command and safety are all important buzzwords for today's fire service. If you keep abreast of what goes on around the country, you're probably aware of MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System). MABAS is by far the most progressive mutual-aid system in the United States, and it exemplifies many

of these buzzwords. Although MABAS has been in existence since the late 1960s, it took on a larger role after 9/11. Recently, it took delivery of 25 new state-of-the-art decon units.

MABAS BACKGROUND

MABAS originally covered Northern Illinois; however, its role was eventually expanded throughout the state of Illinois, Wisconsin, and parts of Indiana, Iowa and Missouri. To make a long story short, MABAS provides a one-stop shopping resource to activate and mobilize fire, EMS and special operations assets for more than 1,100 fire departments in these states.

MABAS also offers specialized operation teams for hazmat, underwater recovery, technical rescue, incident management and certified fire investigation.

In 2004, MABAS began to discuss the acquisition of hazmat decon units. "Previously, the Illinois Police Department had the only decon unit in the area," says Chief William Bell, who chaired the Decon Vehicle Committee. "We wanted to design a new vehicle that would be nothing like what was available before. We really had no standing apparatus committee, so we had five MABAS members from throughout the state who had some hazmat background help with the design of the prototype vehicle."

The committee invited as many vendors as possible to attend a meeting, so everyone was on the same

MABAS Specs

- International 4300 chassis with DT 466 engine
- 26' body that includes command and communications areas accessible from cab.
- Automated patient lift system and exterior and interior operations.
- Automated over/under spray system for ambulatory patients and interior/exterior processing.
- Gender separation throughout, including exterior egress area on lift gate and interior technical decon areas.
- Electronically controlled temperature and more than 1 million BTUs of heating capacity without any heat recycling.
- Automated water-pressure controller with multiple inputs.
- Decon injection system that creates tempered solutions for effective decon.
- Can be outfitted with RadDecon Radiological Decon Solutions.
- Completely outfitted for total consequence management response, including radiological decontamination.

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APPARATUS IDEAS



The vehicles' interior shower decontamination area features an automated over/under spray system for ambulatory patients.

“Previously, the Illinois Police Department had the only decon unit in the area. We wanted to design a new vehicle that would be nothing like what was available before.”

page. The committee's demands were simple: It wanted a high-quality, functional vehicle that would give them the most bang for their buck. The committee was able to secure \$5 million in funding from the Department of Homeland Security and the Illinois Terrorist Task Force for 25 decon units as well as additional equipment for various divisional hazmat teams throughout the system.

Seven vendors attended the meeting; five submitted bids. Modec, a manufacturer from the Denver area, was eventually chosen to build the 25 units. “We believed Modec was the best company to build the units based on their past experience in building CBRN response technologies into one apparatus,” Bell says. “They also had a great deal of experience building vehicles for the U.S. government and Homeland Security.”

A WHOLE NEW DESIGN

The committee traveled to the Modec factory and looked over the operation before purchase and then again when the first two vehicles were being built. “We had one change we made to the floor, so that it sloped toward the drain,” Bell says. “Other than that, we were really happy with their operation, the final outcome of the vehicles and the quality.” MABAS took delivery on the first vehicle in the spring of 2007 and deliveries followed about every 6–8 weeks after that.

The vehicles were designed for more than just mass decon. “We wanted these vehicles to be multifunctional,” Bell says. “Our dive teams use them to don wet suits and then shower off after they come out of the water. They can be used for rehab both in a heated and air-conditioned environment, and they were recently used in areas that had massive flooding and served in a first responder role, and also in a hazmat decon capacity.”

Training in the operation of the units came from the divisional hazmat teams. “We picked four team members and gave them a

train-the-trainer course,” Bell says. “They in turn went back to their teams and provided additional training in the operation and SOPs for the 25 units.”

APPARATUS DISTRIBUTION

The units are dispersed all over the state. “We tried to put them in areas with large populations, and near some of our large universities, where if something were to happen, we would have a unit close by to respond,” Bell says. The fire departments that house the vehicles must agree to respond all over the state or wherever the vehicles are needed, as well as to maintain and stock the vehicle.

The vehicles carry Class A and B hazmat suits, brushes, hoses, garbage cans, jockey pumps, disposable towels and blankets. They can be outfitted with additional equipment depending on the response role.

“All in all, we were very happy with Modec,” Bell says. “We received all 25 units within an 18-month period and were able to put the vehicles in service quickly. Any bugs we had were quickly fixed by the manufacturer.”



An exterior rehab area allows the vehicles to be used for rehab as well as exterior processing of victims.

FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

If you're looking into hazmat or decon vehicles, take a look at Modec and also the operations of MABAS. Although your operations might not be as complex or cover as large an area as MABAS does, you can learn a lot from their mutual-aid plan. Their Web site (www.mabas-il.org) has a wealth of information, including SOPs. An entire article could be written about their radio system and multistate mutual-aid plan.

One final note: I can't say enough about visiting the factory before and most certainly after you make an apparatus purchase. In this case, some adjustments were made to two existing vehicles before MABAS took delivery, enabling the remaining 23 units to have the updates in place before delivery.

Proper planning before the sale is the name of the game. ☺

Bob Vaccaro has more than 30 years of fire-service experience. He is a former chief of the Deer Park (N.Y.) Fire Department. Vaccaro has also worked for the Insurance Services Office, The New York Fire Patrol and several major commercial insurance companies as a senior loss-control consultant. Vaccaro is a life member of the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

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