

## D/FW Airport prepares for worst

Date **December 6, 2001**

Source **GORDON DICKSON**Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Section **Metro;Fort Worth & Region**

Edition **FINAL**

D/FW AIRPORT - Large needles to treat victims of mustard gas. Hand-held gadgets that can detect blister agents in the air. Space-age bodysuits to guard against exposure to fallout from biological weapons, or perhaps even a crude nuclear bomb. Foam capable of neutralizing almost any material that a terrorist might use. Just as their predecessors prepared for the Cold War, police and firefighters at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport are priming for a disaster, embarking on a \$500,000 shopping spree to prepare the airport to handle - or prevent - casualties if a weapon of mass destruction is unleashed on the property. The airport board will be asked to approve purchase of the equipment at today's regular meeting. The D/FW Department of Public Safety will train regularly with the high-tech gear, which will be stored at an airport fire station for deployment within a minute or two of a biological or a chemical attack.



Unlike their Cold War counterparts, who encouraged children to seek shelter from atomic bombs under their school desks and built underground shelters in their back yards, public safety officials

say the high-dollar precautions being taken really could save lives. "It is realistic. Otherwise, we wouldn't be doing this," D/FW Fire Chief Alan Black said. "We believe it can save lives. We have training. Once we get this equipment, we will be fully prepared. It allows us to readily identify chemicals and biological agents. The whole secret is early identification and quick action. We start collecting data from multiple points. We narrow down to whether it's biological or chemical and take it to that next step. We would always rather be dealing with a known problem than an unknown."

The decision to consider the equipment comes the same week that Federal Aviation Administrator Jane Garvey toured D/FW Airport for a firsthand glimpse of the security and safety measures that the airport has made since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. On Wednesday, Garvey was briefed on the capabilities of the equipment, much of which is still on order, during a tour of the airport. She said that D/FW is among the first airports nationwide to take dramatic steps to improve its ability to detect or respond to weapons of mass destruction. "We put a number of measures in place immediately after the 11th. They are the right measures, but they are not going to be the only measures," Garvey said during a news conference at Terminal B. "And, as we move forward, and as we think about some of the challenges that we have, certainly technology is going to play a part. ... All of that I think will be part of the future as we think of a world where security is even greater and threats are certainly far greater than before Sept. 11."

The airport consulted with FBI counter-terrorism experts before making their decisions. Among the items the airport is purchasing is a decontamination trailer that, when unfolded, includes separate tents for men and women to shower in fresh, warm water. The trailer can hold 15,000 gallons of a special foam created by Sandia National Laboratories that can neutralize chemical agents such as nerve gas, or biological agents such as anthrax. Similar systems are being installed in Los Angeles airports, but D/FW is among the first to buy the equipment, said Alvy Dodson, D/FW vice president of public safety. "We're putting together a program to give us an appropriate response to weapons of mass destruction," he said. "Our goal is to recognize and effectively respond to an incident. Right now, we have our people trained. But, with our equipment, we can only treat 24 people per hour. With this equipment, we will be able to treat 300 people per hour." The equipment is needed because, if a weapon of mass destruction were used at D/FW, the airport public safety team would be in charge of the rescue and recovery scene until federal officials arrived, he said. "We're going to have it for probably the first couple of hours," Dodson said. The Sandia foam was developed about five years ago, and its ingredients include many common household ingredients such as hair conditioner and toothpaste, said John German, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Energy lab in New Mexico.

"Other products have some drawbacks. Chlorine is corrosive and toxic. This foam, you could hold it in your hand," he said. "It's friendly to most materials, even in an office. It's not harmful to the environment." Ron Pruitt, a production manager at Modex - a Denver company that is selling D/FW its decontamination trailer and other supplies - said airports are looking into high-dollar equipment because they want to be able to approach catastrophes with as much information, and as little guesswork, as possible. "The good far outweighs the cost," he said. "If it was some kind of

chemical or anthrax attack, it could be very significant in reducing casualties and cross-contamination." Pruitt said that while airports might not be able to prevent a chemical or a biological attack, "once it happens you can go in and clean up an area." It would rather be in a city where they had something than a city where they had nothing. The devastation it could cause with deaths could be great. You could have a devastating event where 200,000 people die, but if you save 50,000 people, that's worthwhile."

### **Ready for the worst**

Dallas/Fort Worth Airport is investing \$500,000 in equipment designed to save lives in the event of a biological or chemical attack. Airport police officers and firefighters will be trained to use the equipment. The idea is to have equipment available to quickly identify the type of weapon being used, and to contain it quickly. Foam: Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico has developed a foam capable of neutralizing most chemical or biological threats, including anthrax and nerve gases. The foam can be sprayed on people who have been exposed. It also is noncorrosive, and can be sprayed on office equipment without ruining it. Supplier: Modec of Denver, Colo. Cost \$75,937 (price includes other accessories, such as decontamination pop-up tents. Hand-held detectors: Can identify contaminants in the air. Powered by commercial C-size batteries. Can be programmed to automatically clear its data readings and reset after each use, or serve as a continuous monitor. Supplier: Barringer Instruments of Warren, N.J. Cost: \$68,365. Decontamination trailer and pop-up tents: Combination of trailers and tents can be assembled in two minutes. Men and women can undergo a decontaminating shower (with fresh, warm water) in separate tents. Can spray up to 15,000 gallons of foam remotely without any fuel or electricity, and can spray thousands of additional gallons if hooked to a fire line. Supplier: Modec. Cost: \$134,000. Life-saving drugs: Rescuers would be able to inject themselves with life-saving treatments for agents such as mustard gas, and treat exposed civilians. Supplier: Meridian Medical Technologies of Columbia, Md. Cost \$17,547. Cyanide antidote kits: One of several antidotes the airport wants to keep on hand. Supplier: Akorn of Buffalo Grove, Ill. Cost \$22,885.

Source: Dallas/Fort Worth Airport