


THE SUN



YUMA, ARIZONA

County showcases new mobile biodecontamination unit

BY JAMES GILBERT
SUN STAFF WRITER

Firefighters and emergency personnel from around Yuma County got their first look at the newest tool in the county's bioterrorism toolbox — a mobile biological decontamination unit.

The 24-foot trailer-based decontamination unit, accompanied by three air-inflated shelters, is the first of its kind in Arizona, county officials said, and is specifically designed to expand the capability of first responders to decontaminate and provide medical care for victims of chemical or biological incidents and hazardous waste spills.

"This particular unit is intended to help communities better prepare for mass casualty situations involving chemical agents or weapons of mass destruction," said Mark Hutsell, safety officer for Yuma Regional Medical Center.

Brian Kalamanka, president of Modec Inc., the company that builds the trailer, was at the Yuma County Health Department on Wednesday giving a demonstration to health department

staff and firefighters on how to set up the unit and its capabilities.

Attending the demonstration were members of the San Luis Fire Department, the city of Yuma Fire Department, the Somerton/Cocopah Fire Department and personnel from YRMC.

"It's good that the county has one of these," said San Luis Fire Chief Arturo Miranda. "While it's different from the type of equipment we've had to use in the past, this will be quicker and help us respond to our communities better."

Both Marine Corps' Air Station Yuma and the city of Yuma have decontamination units, but they aren't mobile, which requires the units be transported to the site and then assembled.

"Those can get to somewhere quick, but then all the equipment will need to be set up, which takes time," said Michael Lebrun, communications coordinator for the county's bioterrorism preparedness unit. "This unit is more rapid and completely self-contained, meaning it can be hauled to where it's needed."

The decontamination unit,

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MANY BENEFITS

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PHOTO BY CHARLES WHITEHOUSE/THE SUN

CITY OF YUMA FIREFIGHTERS Patrick Estrada (foreground) and David Padilla look over the shower heads on the inside of the decontamination unit.

UNIT

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which serves as a mass rinse center, is equipped with eight internal shower heads and four external shower heads that rinse victims with a mixed detergent and water solution.

Other features include polyethylene floors, hot water heaters, air conditioners, floor drains, ventilation equipment and tanks to contain water runoff.

Money to purchase the \$196,000 decontamination unit was made possible by a grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration, in collaboration with YRMC.

"When the grant money was approved, we sat down and talked about what types of equipment would best benefit those agencies within the county that could respond to an incident," Hutsell said.

The board of supervisors approved the purchase of the decontamination unit in April.

Although the county will own the unit, it will be operated by YRMC.



PHOTO BY CHARLES WHITEHOUSE/THE SUN

EXPLAINING SOME OF the features of a new decontamination unit to Yuma, Somerton, San Luis and other firefighters, Brian Kalamanka, president of Modec Inc., of Denver, Colo., shows the inside of the unit Wednesday morning.

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