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LDEQ trains for emergencies they hope never happen

BATON ROUGE – Learning how to handle an environmental crisis is invaluable for emergency responders, but gaining that knowledge without experiencing a real emergency is often difficult. Seven members of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality’s Emergency and Radiological Services Division (LDEQ ERSD) found an easier way when they attended two days of intense training.

Hosted by Colonial Pipeline at The Response Group’s (TRG) sprawling training facility in Paradis, the event featured demonstrations of remedial and containment activities, including hands-on exercises. Six rotations at seven stations offered demonstrations of: wildlife response; on-water containment, protection and recover; onshore containment, protection and recovery with vacuum truck to frac tank transfer/storage overview; field communications with satellite and drone applications; field air monitoring; source control and pipeline repair; and environmental field response with sampling, Response and Recovery, GeoProbe/monitoring wells, waste management, shoreline cleanup and assessment technology (SCAT).

In the classroom, manikins were used to simulate potential threats from individuals. Class participants used the PRDs to locate possible radiological/nuclear (R/N) sources on the person or in a bag or backpack. Participants also received training on how to approach suspicious individuals and defuse potential confrontations.

“This type of training is invaluable to our personnel as they collaborate with partners to enhance best practices in environmental emergency response,” said Aurelia Giacometto, LDEQ Secretary. “Investing in our teams’ knowledge and skill sets are the best defense for events we hope never happen. Nonetheless, we will be prepared.”

As the day began, groups of steel-toe booted responders, consultants and support personnel crowded around the demonstration sites. A small drilling rig was set up at one station where the crowd could get an idea of how sampling wells are installed. Some attendees even got up close and personal with a T-handle punch and hand auger that are used to measure subsurface soil properties in impacted areas.



An attendee gets a hands-on experience collecting a soil sample with a T-handle punch



Staff install a dam during simulation of a spill on the concrete river model

A 200-foot-wide segment of canal flanks one side of the facility, and it's there that response craft were deployed to set containment boom and show attendees how a spill on water should be addressed. Just down the bank from that demonstration, technical crews were showing off a cement-formed river with built-in features simulating stormwater drains, manhole covers, culverts and locations to accommodate underflow and Water-Gate dam installation. Simulated pollution can be added to the water flowing down the miniature river to show how it impacts different riparian features.

According to Jon Wickersham, Emergency Response Specialist with Colonial, the overall purpose of this year's Colonial Tier 3 event was to "Bring the Command Post to the Field Response".

"To accomplish this, we assigned everyone on our IMT (incident management team) to the Operations Section on Tuesday. We were at the ICP (incident command post) and our training was to walk everyone through the Tactical Planning Process and development of the 204 Work Assignments.

"Our objectives, as provided by Unified Command, were to generate a series of interactive workstations mimicking Areas of Operation expected on a flammable hazardous liquid emergency response. We provided the team with information regarding resources and expected demonstration activities and they walked through the 234/215/204 ICS forms (operational planning) process followed by Safety and Environmental Review," Wickersham said.

"It was a really good hands-on experience," LDEQ emergency responder Miranda Brengartner said. "I feel like, compared with other drills I have been to, it was more engaging than a lot of them."

Among the agencies, companies and contractors represented at the workshop were the Environmental Protection Agency, US Coast Guard, Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinators Office, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, LDEQ and Louisiana State Police, American Pollution Control (AMPOL), Cotton Global Disaster Solutions, CTEH, E3 Environmental Services, Ensolum, Hahnville Volunteer Fire Department, Hilcorp, Industrial Emergency Service, Industrial Response Services, Kinder-Morgan, Luling Volunteer Fire Department, Marion Environmental Inc., Marine Spill Response Corporation (MSRC), Paradis Volunteer Fire Department, Phillips 66, Safety Concepts, SET Environmental Inc., Stantec, Sustain, TG Visual, TRG, Walker Hill, Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education Center, and Wildlife Response Services LLC.

“It’s a large event and that allows them (Colonial) to bring in agencies, response contractors and other interested groups. Having multiple training pods lets you sample a little bit of everything,” LDEQ emergency responder Matthew Hollis said.

Attending the event for LDEQ were Brengartner and Hollis, Kevin Borne, Greg Langley, Daniel Lambert, William Loupe and Christian Flucke.

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