

Urban Shield 2016

Donald Mattison, Captain

The 10th anniversary of Urban Shield brought hundreds of first responders from the region, state, country, and overseas to the San Francisco Bay Area for the biggest training event of its kind. The critically acclaimed training exercise, started in 2007, was organized by its creator, Alameda County Sheriff-Coroner Gregory J. Ahern. Urban Shield continues to develop and prepare a multitude of emergency workers for terrorist attacks and natural disasters.

Urban Shield 2016 was scheduled for the weekend of September 11, continuing to remember the tragic events of 2001. Urban Shield was founded on the need to prepare first responders for such horrific events such as those that occurred on that fateful day and continue through today. The motto for Urban Shield 2016, “Intense Training for Intense Times,” is apropos, with the recent incidents in San Bernardino, Orlando, and Dallas, to name just a few. It is vital we remember the first responders who have fallen in service to their communities, as it is equally important to constantly practice for the inevitable future attacks and natural disasters.

The continued need to train for the next “big one,” either a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, is paramount. When we look at the recent worldwide terrorist attacks in France, Germany, and the Istanbul, Turkey, airport, we, as first responders, are constantly reminded of how important it is to train for these types of tragic occurrences. For natural disasters, we can look to the January 2016 blizzards in the eastern United States, the ongoing wild fires in California, and the April 16, 2016, earthquake in Ecuador, which killed more than 650 people.

Urban Shield is a Full Scale Exercise (FSE) that is part of the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) Training and Exercise Program funded by the Department of Homeland Security. Urban Shield was created to improve the preparation and response capabilities of first responders within the Bay Area UASI region through realistic scenarios, based on past and present real world events. Urban Shield also enhances the skills and abilities of those responsible for coordinating and managing large-scale events. Another benefit of Urban Shield is to

The Alameda County Sheriff's Office Special Response Unit responds to an attack on a dignitary convoy. Scenario was based on a powerful bomb attack that blasted through a convoy of cars carrying the interior minister in Cairo, Egypt, on 5 SEP 2013.



Photo compliments of Elizabeth Ferrante

expand local and area partnerships with public safety agencies and private sector entities including local business and critical infrastructure partners.

In 2007, Urban Shield began primarily as a law enforcement-based training exercise, with 22 scenarios and three medical check points for 24 agencies. In 2016, there were 32 scenarios and four medical check points for 36 agencies. Additionally, there were 16 fire scenarios involving Hazardous Materials (HazMat), Urban Search and Rescue (US&R), and Maritime responses. There were five EOD/Bomb Squad scenarios. There also was a stand-alone EMS/MCI training scenario. All of the scenarios were based on real world events that have occurred in different parts of the globe. Every one of the scenarios was designed to prepare local and regional public safety agencies to respond to terrorist attacks, test the physical abilities of the team members, test and evaluate new technologies and equipment, and assess accepted tactics and responses of the public safety community.

Working within all of these disciplines are the emergency management personnel. The personnel were from all walks of life: local, state, and federal government agencies, private corporations, community-based organizations, local volunteers, and more. They coordinated scenarios, activates, core capability testing, and OES activations throughout the greater San Francisco Bay

Area. By no means was the coordination of Urban Shield strictly an exercise. There have been real-world events that have interrupted Urban Shield. In 2013, high winds forced the closure of scenarios on the Bay Bridge and at the Altamont Pass area. Heavy-duty four-wheel-drive vehicles were used to safely transport participants from the Altamont Pass scenario. In 2015, fire strike teams were pulled to fight various forest fires in California.

In 2016, Urban Shield expected more than 70 teams of different disciplines from the local and regional area of the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as agencies throughout the State of California. National and international teams included Mexican Federal Police, Republic of China (Taiwan), Orange County (FL) Sheriff's Office, and Las Vegas Metro Police. EOD/Bomb squads from the local law enforcement agencies, the United States Army, the United States Air Force, and the United States Marine Corp are also participating. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) co-hosted a scenario. Close to 7,000 volunteers and participants were expected to be part of Urban Shield 2016.

Urban Shield 2016 incorporated a continuous, 48-hour FSE involving regional fire departments, emergency medical services, and local, state, federal, and international law enforcement teams. First responders were challenged to take part in 67 grueling exercise scenarios based on real life critical incidents. These training scenarios took place at a number of locations, throughout the counties of Alameda, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo. Scenario sites incorporated major infrastructure locations, such as the Golden Gate Bridge, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), AMTRAK and CalTrain facilities, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), Oakland and San Francisco International Airports, Stanford Linear Accelerator (SLAC), as well as numerous city and county government facilities throughout the Bay Area. Agencies in the aforementioned counties, as well as Contra Costa, Monterey, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma, participated in a 6-hour FSE/functional scenario that included four full-scale points of distribution, using the Incident Command System (ICS). Unified Command was implemented to manage the multilocation and multidiscipline response exercise.

Hosting agencies for Urban Shield 2016 included the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and Sheriff Gregory Ahern, the San Francisco Police Department and Chief Toney Chaplin, the Alameda County Fire Department and Chief David Rocha, and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office and Sheriff Carlos Bolanos. Supporting agencies included the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative, the California Office of Emergency Services, and the US Department of Homeland Security.

TTRDA unit from Taiwan at Urban Shield tactical scenario. The team responds to an attack on a dignitary convoy by terrorists. The team was required to neutralize all threats, secure the scene, and manage casualties while working in conjunction with a rescue task force.



Photo compliments of Kristi Lanzisera

Urban Shield kicked off on Thursday, September 8, with Yellow Command and the critical distribution of water after a severe earthquake. The scenario tested the regional capability of water delivery via C-Pod. On Friday, September 9, there were training seminars and the vendor show located at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton. Saturday and Sunday, September 10 and 11, provided numerous scenarios for all disciplines, and Urban Shield concluded on Monday, September 12, with the final banquet and hot wash.

The hot wash always includes a tremendous keynote speaker. In 2015, the keynote speaker was the Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson. This year's keynote speaker was Sheriff John McMahon of San Bernardino County; his agency was the lead agency with the December 2015 San Bernardino massacre. The winners from law enforcement, fire, and EOD were announced and presented with their trophies and medals.

Urban Shield continues to be the leader in public safety training for first responders in the San Francisco Bay Area, California, the United States, and beyond. The collaboration between public and private stakeholders grows stronger every year as we all strive to be as well prepared as possible for the next "big one," no matter if it is an attack or natural disaster. It is through the efforts of all the participants that we are better prepared for these intense times.

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Fall 2016

Volume 16, Edition 3

JSOM

JOURNAL of SPECIAL OPERATIONS MEDICINE™



THE JOURNAL FOR OPERATIONAL MEDICINE AND TACTICAL CASUALTY CARE



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