

# HART CR1 Training

AS MOST OF YOU WILL BE AWARE, THE FIRST WAVE OF PARAMEDICS HAVE NOW BEEN RECRUITED TO THE HART TEAM, AND THEY WILL BE AMONG THE FIRST IN THE COUNTRY ALLOWED TO GO INTO THE 'HOT ZONE' OF A MAJOR INCIDENT WHEN NEAS GO LIVE IN 2010.



In order to give you a better understanding of HART, we'll be following one group of recruits throughout their training to find out what being in the team means. Angela Laybourn, based at Washington station will be giving us her thoughts along the way and talking about the challenges of the intensive training from a recruit's point of view.

The first specialist training that all HART trainees undertake is their CR1 (Civil Responder) training, at Police HQ in Ponteland, I went along last month to their second day of training on the two day course to investigate.

The main purpose of the CR1 training is to familiarise staff with the civil responder suit that they would be wearing in the event of a CBRN incident. I spoke with PC Paul Glendenning, Specialist Skills Learning and Development Officer to find out more: "Over the two day course, the main purpose is to make sure that staff know their suit and equipment inside out, it's vital that in the event of a real emergency they can keep themselves safe so they can help others. We take them through what kind of substances they're likely to be up against in a real emergency and in the afternoon will test them on how well they know their suits by taking them into a chamber filled with CS gas."

I also asked Paul what he thought of the HART team as a concept, he said: "I think that the concept of the HART team is fantastic. It definitely plugs a gap that's been needed for a long time. We need their knowledge on scene and it helps to free us up to do our job as well."

We settle down to a presentation by Paul's colleague PC Paul Griffiths, also a Specialist Skills Learning and Development Officer. During the background CBRN training, the team are shown a harrowing video, which is the only one of its kind, showing the devastating effects of a nerve gas attack during the 1998 gulf war. It's shocking stuff and I wonder how the team would feel about seeing this for real.

Most trainees commented that although it would be difficult to see patients in pain, as it always is, being well trained is the most important thing they can do to help. I get the feeling that the types of people applying for the HART team are definitely not the kind to shy away from a challenge.

A fair few number of the team are into very physical activities outside of work and Angela admits this was a huge draw for her: "The whole concept of the HART team was so different from my normal job and the physical aspect was a big attraction. I'm very much into keeping fit outside of work

so I didn't think twice about applying for the team."

One of the main things that the recruits were taught was effective use of their gas masks, with spontaneous drills throughout the day making sure they could put theirs on in under ten seconds. Any longer could mean a lethal dose of a biological or chemical agent.

I tried on one of the masks to get a better understanding of how the team were feeling and they are quite restrictive, I imagine it would be easy to panic, but during training all the recruits seemed at ease.

One of the things that whole team seemed to struggle with during the training was the heat, it was a beautiful day in Ponteland and to be wrapped up in three different layers must have been unbearable. PC Griffiths said: "Because of the nature of wearing the suits there are different recommendations for how long they can be worn. For example in a real incident shuttling patients back and forwards on spinal boards would be very high intensity and the suit could only be worn for 30 minutes at a time, but doing quite sedentary work means the suit can be worn for up to two hours."

And now came the part that everybody was nervous about, the gas chamber! We were taken to the police's main tactical training ground where they train in responding to petrol bombs, violent members of the public and also methods of entry. Sitting rather inconspicuously in the corner was a container which had windows fitted to it. This was filled with CS gas and the team was taken in, in groups of two to test out their gas masks for real, and to see how they coped under the pressure.

I was stood well back at a distance but every now and then when the fumes drifted over it does have you coughing and spluttering so imagine how hard it was for the recruits who had to remove their masks and shout out their name before being allowed to leave the container!

And lucky Angela, who I'll be shadowing throughout her training, was there on her birthday, so her group had to try and sing happy birthday to her through the fumes!

There were paramedics from all over the patch on the course that I attended, Blucher being the most northerly and Middlesbrough being the furthest south. I spoke to Richard Morgan, based at Middlesbrough about why he applied: "It was the first new initiative that had come up in the service for years and it really interested me. I went for it as soon as it came up and travelling to the HQ



in Hebburn once it's up and running was never much of an issue for me, although I can see how it would be for some. But if there are any other Teesside staff interested I'd tell them to just go for it and don't worry about the travelling."

The last part of the day was showing staff how to safely remove the suits and going through the decontamination process. Reflecting on HART PC Paul Griffiths said: "The good thing about HART is that it's pulling all the agencies on a scene together. We need the paramedics' expertise on scene at the point of discovering a patient in order that they can be triaged correctly. For example we or one of the other agencies on scene, may prioritise somebody that can't be saved over somebody that still has a chance to be rescued, and the knowledge of a paramedic would be vital in that situation."

I had a great day and would like to thank both trainers, Paul Griffiths and Paul Glendenning as well as the logistics staff Terry Allan and Andy Cameron for making me feel so welcome. Next stop Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) training in Merseyside!

There are still places left on the HART team, if you're interested and think you have what it takes you can email [hart@neas.nhs.uk](mailto:hart@neas.nhs.uk) for more information.

**Kerri James**

#### IMAGES

1. The recruits with their trainers
2. Angela Laybourn from Washington Station
3. Peter Read from Hawkey's Lane during a gas mask drill
4. Inside the container
5. The affectionately named 'daisy chain' method of checking the CR1 suit seal
6. Learning how to decontaminate safely
7. Kerri getting a feel for life on the HART team