

News Release

Emergency response teams tested at one of largest disaster exercises in Canadian history

TORONTO - Emergency response teams took part in a live, simulated large-scale disaster exercise today at a Toronto-area hotel, involving a simulated bomb blast. The purpose of the exercise was to test the coordination and interoperability of these teams in a real emergency, and identify where improvements can be made. In total, close to 1,000 participants, observers, and evaluators were involved.

Sponsored by Public Safety Canada, this mock disaster involved four emergency responder teams:

The Public Health Agency of Canada's newly established Health Emergency Response Team (HERT);
Public Safety Canada's four Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR) Teams;
The Ontario Ministry of Health's Emergency Medical Assistance Team (EMAT); and
The Ontario Provincial Police's Provincial Emergency Response Team (PERT).

Also in attendance was the Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario and the Ontario Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, George Smitherman.



Minister Clement visited the site of one of the largest disaster exercises ever to take place in Canada. Emergency teams from the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government worked in partnership to stage and execute this national deployment exercise which tested the Public Health Agency of Canada's first Health Emergency Response Team. This realistic national deployment exercise which took place in Toronto, required that some 300 casualties with various life-threatening injuries be extricated from under concrete rubble, pancaked cars and twisted steel, and then treated on-site in a portable hospital.

"It's vital to be fully prepared in the case of an emergency in Canada, and today's mock disaster will allow us to practice how to best protect Canadians," said Minister Clement. "We have made a special addition to today's exercise -- our new Health Emergency Response Team."

The HERT team is comprised of 185 medical professionals and support staff, and can be rapidly deployed anywhere in Canada on short notice to provide medical surge capacity support in an emergency.

Also involved were the Government of Canada's HUSAR teams, which are made up of emergency responders that carry out complex rescue operations in collapsed structures and other difficult situations. This was

HUSAR's second national exercise. To support HUSAR's work, the Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety made an investment in Toronto's new Heavy Urban Search and Rescue facility.

“As Public Safety Minister, I am proud to be sponsoring today's mock emergency exercise, which is an amalgamation of Canada's trained emergency response teams,” said Minister Day. “I am also proud to announce an investment of more than \$2 million in the new Toronto HUSAR facility, which will strengthen our on-going urban search and rescue capabilities.”

“Ontario's highly mobile and highly professional Emergency Medical Assistance Team, or EMAT, is eager to share its practical experience gained through its recent deployments to various emergencies in the province,” said Ontario Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, George Smitherman. “Ontario's national leadership in successfully working with emergency responders from all levels of government will be invaluable in helping the Public Health Agency of Canada's HERT team achieve success.”

Following the mock explosion, the provincial PERT team's role is to secure the site so the Toronto Fire Service's HUSAR team, augmented by teams from Calgary, Manitoba and Halifax, can evacuate simulated casualties from the building and deliver them to the HERT and EMAT teams for treatment. The exercise runs to November 24.

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