

# Annual Report 2002 Hamilton County Urban Search & Rescue Task Force

## USAR

### Governor Ridge Visit & Recognition

The Task Force was privileged to host a visit to Cincinnati by Governor Tom Ridge (Director of Homeland Security ) and Joe Allbaugh (FEMA Director). Governor Ridge addressed a forum of over 200 first responders and government officials gathered at Cincinnati Fire Division's Station 18 at Lunken Airport. During their remarks Governor Ridge spoke highly of the Hamilton County USAR Task Force as a model of public / private partnership to address the threat to the area and improve homeland security and worthy of national duplication.



### Special Awards and Recognition

The Hamilton County USAR Task Force was surprised and pleased to be honored by several area agencies and organizations in the Year 2002.

The Salvation Army recognized the Task Force at their Annual Banquet in April as a provider of "Outstanding Service to the Community". In May, the efforts of the task force were recognized at the American Red Cross Awards Banquet. The US Post Office Cincinnati invited the Task Force for recognition as they unveiled their Emergency Services commemorative stamp in September. Finally, the 5<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Bank made a community service award presentation to the Task Force in October.

Thanks to these organizations—we appreciate their thoughtfulness!!

The Hamilton County Auditor's Report to Citizens contained a description of the USAR Task Force and its work in Hamilton County.

### 2002 Responses

Sharonville Trench Collapse: a collapsed trench dug to expose a residential structure foundation crack for repair collapsed on the elderly homeowner in April. The victim was extricated alive. 45 members responded.

Liberty Township house explosion: in October, the Task Force responded to shore a house severely damaged by natural gas explosion and subsequent fire. The task force provided technical shoring to permit salvage and overhaul. 38 members responded.

The Lincoln Hgts FD requested assistance with a critical missing child in November. The child was located shortly after task force activation. The task force was disregarded prior to establishment of base of operations.

We also provided search dog referral for a double fatal auto accident in Whitewater Twp with circumstances that indicated a child may have been thrown from the wreckage. No child was found. Investigation revealed no child had been present.

We consulted with law enforcement and local fire departments on several other missing persons cases during the year without task force activation.

### **Change of Response Policy**

After review of responses, Task Force senior staff approved a

change of response activation policy that calls for immediate activation of the Task Force in collapsed structure, trench, confined space and high angle situations when the request is initiated by the FD Incident Commander. In cases of SEARCH situations, the policy of DUTY OFFICER review remains in place prior to activation of the Task Force.

Maintaining the Duty Officer page and consult before a SEARCH situation arises from analysis of multiple search consults the Task Force has done over the last two years. In nearly all cases the Duty Officer has been able to assist without Task Force activation. Most of the situations in which we consulted involved children with custody issues or runaways.

### **Personnel**

The Task Force has a roster of 105 members. Twenty-seven (27) departments are represented.

As the year ended, 2 members were being asked to leave the Task Force for not meeting the minimum attendance requirement for the second consecutive year. Requirements for 2002 were more stringent than previous and 20 members were notified of their deficiencies for immediate correction. We are still maintaining an applicant list of over 30 names.

### **Logistics**

Responsibility for management of the monthly work detail, occurring on the first Wednesday of the month was transferred from the TRAINING Work Group to LOGISTICS Work Group in 2002. A more aggressive effort to notify members of their assignment resulted in better attendance and improved attention to detail. The monthly work detail improves familiarity with equipment and operational readiness.

### **Training**

A stronger training schedule resulted from changes made in the management of Task Force training in the Year 2002.

Topics included for 2002: Line Rescue, Concrete Breaching and Breaking, Water Environments, Shoring Review and Machinery situations.

During the year several task force members joined personnel from all major metropolitan areas of the State to participate in a joint training week aimed at developing a core of trainers for Structural Collapse training at the "Operations" level. Intent was to begin a consistent approach to structural collapse rescue training and response across the state. Driving force behind the cooperation is the establishment of a coalition of technical rescue teams – to be called USAR STRIKE TEAMS - -ready for response to anywhere in the state within 2 hours.

### **World Trade Center**

### **Deployment sequelae**

The eighteen members of Hamilton County USAR who are members of Ohio Task Force-1 that were deployed to the World Trade Center collapse were often in demand for discussions of "lessons learned" from their participation in that event.

Several of them also displayed signs and symptoms consistent with a respiratory syndrome termed "World Trade Center cough". They have filed federal worker's compensation claims which are slow in processing at this time.

We have purchased a couple tools that they observed and described as very useful in the WTC situation.

### **Funding / Finance**

Principal funding for the on-going costs of operating the Task Force continue to come from private funds.

In January 2002, we received a \$25,000 donation from the Cinergy Foundation. We received a \$5000 donation from the Andrew Jergens Foundation early in 2002.

A generous grant that has been "recurring" was received from the Robert and Adele Schiff Foundation. WE THANKS THESE THREE FOUNDATIONS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION AND CONFIDENCE!!

The financial records of the Task Force have been reorganized and the method for accounting changed.

It is anticipated that an audit of the financial transactions will be completed in the Spring of 2003, under the auspices of the Hamilton County Fire Chiefs Association.

### **State of Ohio Tech Rescue Planning**

The Hamilton County USAR Task Force has evolved as the model being used by the Ohio Fire Chief's Association and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency to expand the technical rescue capability of the state.

Hamilton County's approach is being suggested for duplication in Franklin, Cuyahoga, Lucas and Summit counties for development of a quick response technical rescue capability ahead of the arrival of Ohio Task Force-1 and other Federal USAR Task Forces.

It is anticipated that state dollars may become available to assist with annual maintenance costs of Hamilton County USAR under state planning in which Hamilton County is playing a lead role by invitation of the Ohio Fire Chief's Association.

### **Report to Fire Chief's Association and Disaster Council**

The USAR Task Force has filed a program description detailing strengths and limitations of the Task Force with the Hamilton County Fire Chief's Association and with the Hamilton County Disaster Council.

Such document serves to keep current the understanding of the Fire Chiefs and the other participants in the Disaster Council process with the capabilities of the USAR Task Force as a special response resource.

The "limitations" list is being used to direct work of the Task Force and to identify funding needs and priorities for the year.

Who are we?

The Hamilton County Urban Search & Rescue Task Force is a project of the Hamilton County Fire Chief's Association intended to provide a specially trained, specially equipped technical rescue response team to support our members in technical rescue situations. The Task Force has been operational since 1998.

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