

News Release

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Firefighters Put Through Their Paces by Defence Animal Training Regiment

Last Saturday (16 November), 24 firefighters from Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service attended a decontamination workshop led by the Defence Animal Training Regiment (DATR) at Remount Barracks.

The one-day training saw military working horses and dogs covered in an 'unknown chemical', as part of two practical scenarios for firefighters and the Services' Technical Rescue Team to deal with.

First, firefighters were given demonstrations on how to handle a horse and then they moved onto the scenarios, in which they needed to consider the processes used in the decontamination of horses and dogs and to try out different procedures.

One scenario was of a military horse handler and his horse, who had come into contact with an unknown substance. The military handler had to dry clean as much of the chemical off the horse and himself before they both entered a shower, which was built using a hose strung up between two fire engines.

Crew Manager Ainsley Burton, who acted as the Incident Commander, said: "It's been an interesting day and a very big learning curve for everyone. It was also an opportunity for the Army to see the equipment we have and our capabilities. It's been a really good test of our own operational procedures."

Major Drew Tootal, the Second-In-Command at the DATR, said: "This was a first for both of us. The aim was to understand what the processes are should any animals come into accidental contact with a hazardous material. It could be as simple as a dog coming into contact with a fuel oil, such as diesel during a search.

“Readiness comes through training and both sides have taken away several learning points that we will use to develop training.”

The next part of this scenario saw firefighters wearing full protective suits to treat a further two contaminated horses, with an additional problem of one of the horses not wanting to enter the shower.

Major Drew Tootal, added: “Just because one horse will happily go between the two fire engines, it doesn’t mean they all will. This is where we can work together to come up with alternative solutions that will benefit not just ourselves, but the horse community as a whole, while keeping everyone safe in the process.”

The second scenario saw a military working dog and his handler come into contact with an unknown chemical. They were put through a mobile decontamination tent that would be used for humans. Firefighters gave directions to the dog handler through screens built into the tent.

Major Tootal continued: “Our military working dogs and their handlers don’t normally do this type of training, so it gives us the opportunity to see how our animals would react, and how we can best care for them in an emergency, which for us is just as important as keeping our soldiers safe.

“We hope that the workshop leads to further collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Service so that we can both develop protocols to benefit animal safety.”

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Notes to Editors:

Photograph: Defence Animal Training Regiment (DATR), Remount Barracks.

Interviews: can be arranged through prior arrangement with Corporate Communications on the details below.

About the Service

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency response, prevention and protection services from 20 stations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Its headquarters is based in Birstall, Leicester.

During 2018/19, the Service attended 762 road traffic collisions, of which 125 were extrications from vehicles, in addition to 2,569 fires. We carried out 6,746 home safety checks and fitted 4,790 smoke alarms. 279 schools were visited as part of the Service’s schools programme, delivering fire and road safety education to pupils. Staff organised or took part in 1,068 community safety events, promoting fire and road safety and arson prevention, and 134 Virtual Fatal Four (VF4) events as part of the Service’s young drivers’ road safety project.

The Service’s prevention, education, enforcement and inspection programmes have resulted in significant reductions in the number of incidents. In the last ten years, fire-related incidents have reduced by over 30 percent.

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