

Training for the RNC

by Sgt. John Riley
St. Paul PD Bomb Squad

There was excitement and surprise throughout the city when St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman announced that the 2008 Republican National Convention would be hosted by the City of St. Paul. Nobody was more surprised than the members of Minnesota's four local area bomb squads! It was clear from the start that all of our bomb squad personnel would be very busy preparing for and supporting the event. The convention would require interagency cooperation from across the state of Minnesota. Planning for the event began almost immediately. Several issues arose during the preliminary planning process which highlighted the need for specialized training and equipment over and above our normal training regimen.

The special training began in May when SA Kerry Svare of the ATF sponsored a post blast investigation course in the metro area. SABT Dan Nesbit of the FBI followed the post blast training by hosting a course on specialized hand entry techniques and cap diagnostics. This course was taught by the Hazardous Device Response Unit out of FBI Headquarters and was attended by bomb technicians from Minnesota, North Dakota as well as instructors from the Hazardous Devices School in Huntsville Alabama. SABT Nesbit followed the H.D.R.U. training by hosting a Large Vehicle Bomb Counter Measures course taught by instructors from the Hazardous Devices School.

The planning phase of convention preparation highlighted the need for multiple render safe teams capable of responding to a scene rapidly with a full load of equipment to handle a problem. All members of the render safe teams were HDS certified bomb technicians. Both the FBI and ATF provided bomb techs to assist us. After the addition of these federal assets, we sub-divided the four bomb squads into nine smaller render safe response teams. Each team had specific responsibilities/missions as well as areas of responsibility. This team multiplication along with the unique problems posed by hosting the biggest political event in the history of the state of Minnesota highlighted the need for additional equipment; Equipment we did not possess. Several companies stepped up to the plate and agreed to assist us by providing equipment and technical support toward a successful completion of the event.

iRobot Corp. provided technical service to our Packbot 500 and an additional Packbot 510 for use during the event. The addition of another Packbot allowed us to equip every Render Safe team with at least one robot system.

Envision Product Design provided two real time OpenVision LT x-ray systems for use during the event. These x-rays provided a rapid real time diagnostics capability for our RSP teams. The addition of real time x-ray gave us the

capability to rapidly handle the anticipated "Bag Drop" scenarios experienced at previous political conventions. Ahura Scientific loaned us an Ahura First Defender for use during the RNC and Brent Hostutler, a representative for the company provided training and technical support during the convention. This effectively doubled our response capacity since we already own one unit. The First Defender, a machine which uses Raman Spectroscopy technology to analyze substances in a non-invasive manner, proved to be a valuable piece of equipment during the convention. The First Defender was called into action on the very first "run" of the convention after United States Secret Service and Customs Agents reported a suspicious package containing an unknown liquid had been deposited at the vehicle screening check point during the overnight hours. The Ahura First Defender allowed us to clear the package with minimal disruption to the vehicle screening area.

ICOR Technologies rushed the order of a new Caliber Robot in order to enable adequate squad training and preparation prior to the convention. Several ICOR staff members flew to Minnesota to present and train our technicians on the new Caliber Robot.

Excellent planning, training and interagency cooperation contributed to the overall success of the convention. Overwhelming support from our product specialists/vendors prove to be an invaluable part of the equation.



Long walk on a suspicious package (also on cover.)

John Riley is an HDS Certified Bomb Technician and has worked in law enforcement for 12 years. He is a Sergeant/Investigator assigned to the Saint Paul Police Bomb Squad and Arson Unit. John has been a member of the IABTI, Region III, since 2004.