



Firefighters get chemical and gas detection meters

By Jay Pateakos

Herald News Staff Reporter

Last update Sep 23, 2008 @ 09:58 PM

Swansea — Thanks to a \$43,000 grant as part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program, Swansea firefighters will be able to detect and neutralize harmful chemicals while at the scene of a crisis.

The department received two Ahura Scientific's FirstDefender Chemical Identification Instruments, which enable the department to rapidly identify unknown chemicals directly in the field, including explosives, narcotics, chemical warfare agents, toxic industrial chemicals and more. This will help allow them to respond faster to chemical threats and address them, according to Fire Chief Peter Burke.

"The other gas meters we had only worked for CO₂ and not for other chemicals," said Burke. "This will help us to quickly identify what we are dealing with."

More than 100 volunteer firefighters will be taking the three-hour-long course on how to work the detectors during the coming months. Two training sessions have already been held.

FirstDefender, a handheld detection instrument, is able to identify up to 6,500 solid and liquid substances. An automatic mixture analysis is conducted during every scan, allowing identification of up to five component substances. Using Raman spectroscopy, the units can even identify substances directly through sealed plastic or glass containers. They are built to military standards for ruggedness, including drop, shock and vibration tests, as well as operation under extreme temperatures. The units are part of many state and local hazmat and law enforcement teams and military organizations.

Since CEDAP's inception in 2005, more than 5,800 units have been awarded, totaling more than \$103 million to smaller jurisdictions nationwide.

"It will make us more capable of detection and help to keep the firefighters safer," said Burke. "We don't have too many detection-level pollution issues, but it's great to know that what we have will now detect it very quickly and help us to neutralize the situation that much faster."

E-mail Jay Pateakos at jpateakos@heraldnews.com.

http://www.heraldnews.com/police_and_fire/x1291579167/Firefighters-get-chemical-and-gas-detection-meters