

Emergency Managers Prepare for the Worst

A National Guard armory in Luzerne County has been transformed into an emergency training ground. A seven-county task force is gathered there to practice handling worst case scenarios.

Inside the armory more than 40 people from seven counties are practicing and preparing for a major disaster.

It may not look like it, but there are three major events happening there at 109th Armory. There's a rally of 25,000 people, a public health scare and a flooding disaster.

The emergency managers are working to handle all three situations.

"We have an equipment cache which they'll draw equipment that they need, computers, printers, radios and then we have three separate spots and they'll actually go to those separate spots to manage the incidents," explained James Major, Jr. of the East Central Pennsylvania Task Force.

Members of emergency agencies from seven counties: Luzerne, Wyoming, Columbia, Northumberland, Schuylkill, Berks and Montour are all there.

They make up what's called the East Central Pennsylvania Task Force, a group that works together to handle major incidents.

"As you can imagine in a flood or a major disaster like a September 11 or Katrina or Rita kind of situations or Agnes, for instance, we need to look at all the players and make sure everyone is signing off the same page, so to speak," said Arthur Kaplan of the Schuylkill County Emergency Management Agency.

The group is training at the armory for three days, something they call priceless, especially if it makes them better prepared to handle the unthinkable.

"We're all working together for a common goal: to make sure that we're better prepared for emergency situations," said Stephen Berkanich of the Luzerne County Emergency Management Agency.

The training will continue until 10 p.m. and will resume Thursday.

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