

Although weather conditions were not ideal, the IED Explosives/Terrorism Awareness Training in Wythe County did take place on Nov. 15 and 16. Instructors and officials from the training believe the knowledge provided there will help to keep all of the areas represented safer.

This two day course was presented by the Department of Criminal Justice Services – Homeland Security Program, FBI, Virginia State Police and Wythe County Sheriff's office. With 42 participating instructors, firefighters, and EMS personnel, the training was seen as huge success in explosives safety and the war on terrorism.

It was designed to enhance an investigator's proficiency and ability to recognize or identify conventional explosives, improvised explosives and improvised explosive devices (IED's), while conducting an investigation.

The course addressed strategies to improve and increase participants with basic post blast forensics and how to process and document a post blast scene. This training also provided a comprehensive overview of IEDs including IED anatomy, types, response guidelines, and history.

One of the most exciting portions of the class, for both students and onlookers kept at a safe distance, was the demonstration of explosives involving the explosion of two cars at Wythe County's Progress Park.

Karl Mercer, retired Bomb Squad Commander from Henrico County Police, Virginia and a DCJS instructor, said the training is something beneficial to all law enforcement and their communities. It can prove safer not only for residents, but for the officers as well.

"Training the force is an integral part of the proper management of incidents and can add to the safety of the officer and the citizen," said Mercer. "Knowing the capabilities of IEDs allow for officers to take proactive and protective actions to save lives and prepare the scene for the interdiction of the bomb squads."

Doug Fender, Special Agent Bomb Technician for the FBI, feels it is a training that is needed today more than ever. With the very real threat of terrorism and war, explosives training can come in handy almost anywhere.

“Improvised explosives and IED's have been a threat for many years in war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Fender. “[The FBI] wants to prepare first responders to deal with the threat and utilization of improvised explosives in the U.S. We think that some of the issues and threats being realized overseas will migrate to the U.S.”

The objectives of the course included preparing responders to perform critical response actions during pre- and post-detonation incidents involving terrorist use of energetic materials, instilling in participants a respect for the destructive potential of energetic materials that may be used in terrorist attacks, Participating in an integrated response to an IED attack using safe and effective techniques, tactics, and procedures and procuring the ability to recognize improvised/home-made explosives and their components.

According to SABB Fender, "training such as this and the ability to identify subjects who might be involved in the manufacturing of improvised explosives is only possible as a result of the excellent partnerships between Federal, State and County/Local law enforcement officials. This training event would not have been possible without the assistance of the Wythe County Administrators office and the Sheriff's Office."