

Edwardsville makes most of training with old Madison County Mutual Building

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville Fire Department is making the most of its fire and rescue training at the old **Madison Mutual office building** just off State Route 157 in Edwardsville with three weeks of specialized training.

Edwardsville Fire Department Capt. James Whiteford said Edwardsville and **Illinois State Police** will also use the building for training.

He said the first part of training, which started over the past few weeks, has gone very well.

“We are doing a number of different types of drills and basic search and rescue within the building,” Whiteford said. “We filled the building up with staged smoke and dummies and simulated an explosion in the building with debris that landed on the fire fighters in full gear, working in the dark and smoke locating victims. That went really well for the two shifts we did.

"It is good training to do this in an unfamiliar environment; it is really valuable for us," he said.

The Madison Mutual building will be torn down soon to make room for new commercial development, but not before providing one last vital service for area residents.

Madison Mutual has moved its headquarters to a new building on South Buchanan in downtown Edwardsville area. The old headquarters sits on a large tract of land that will be used for a business development with several stores and restaurants.

The 20,000-square-foot office building will provide a location for emergency response teams to work on specialized drills such as search-and-rescue in a commercial building, forcible entry, personnel accountability, radio communications, incident command, breaching and clearing, and other drills. Some of the drills will be held jointly to enhance the communication and cooperation between agencies.

“This provides a unique opportunity for both police and fire to practice hands-on skills that can be very difficult to imitate using only props,” **Edwardsville Fire Chief Rick Welle** said.

“While we will not be setting live fires in the building, we will be using artificial smoke and conducting evolutions that will safely challenge our crews, especially in a large building. Residents may notice police, fire and EMS vehicles at the property through March 15. Following the drills, the building will be razed to make room for the new development.”