



Letter to the Editor

November 1 2012 4:48 PM



When a disaster hits, as we just experienced on the east coast, it takes a unique set of responders. This is where the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Illinois Taskforce 1 comes into play. The Illinois Taskforce 1 (IL-TF 1) is a State funded collection of first responders coming to a centralized point of an emergency in a coordinated effort giving aid to those in need. When disasters occur these people are prepared and respond; they are the best of the best.

I am very proud to say our Fire Chief, Bernie Sebold, is a member of this task force in the HAZMAT group. This is a very specialized team, with an extensive selection process, that requires a minimum of fifteen different firefighter state certifications for consideration. Chief Sebold is actually one of only two members of the team south of Springfield; most of the two hundred plus team members are from the Chicago metropolitan area.

Chief Sebold participated in a mobilization exercise drill last week where emergency trucks, helicopters, and mock disasters were spread out across an outdoor staging area. Often, they looked for survivors and injured people who were trapped, in the path of immediate danger, or injured and incapable of controlling their circumstance. Since preparation is vital in emergencies, a disaster base was set up that was self sufficient for up to seventy-two hours with food, water, and shelter. Their primary mission was search and rescue through extrication. It was a group effort of structural engineers, firefighters, HAZMAT teams, surgeons, nurses, and supply teams. It took an enormous effort to coordinate all the resources involved.

A four year old disaster search dog spent the morning with other canines training around fifteen feet of concrete and timber rubble. A rescue dog can determine within ten minutes if a person is alive or dead. These dogs are trained to ignore the dead and focus on survivors.

The training and knowledge Chief Sebold participated in is just one example of the variety of rescue and responses our firefighters are trained to do. Our people train constantly in all types of rescue and emergency situations.

We are very proud of and thank Chief Sebold for his dedication and participation. We also appreciate the mutual aid given by all in our area in time of need and continue to be prepared to assist other communities when called.

Sincerely,

Tom Hoechst, Mayor

City of Alton, Illinois

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