

May 3/10
HF-RCMP
& Fire Dept

Local firefighters train in Riverview

Exercises designed to ensure everyone goes home after an emergency

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By all accounts, the driver of the crinkled compact car was a real dummy.

But firefighters from several departments went to work to rescue him anyway, first carefully covering him so he wouldn't get sprayed with shattering glass before gently breaking the car windows and using big mechanical devices to pry the car doors open and cut off the roof of the vehicle.

But in this case, the dummy really was a dummy, and the rescue was all part of a multidisciplinary training day for firefighters from all over southeastern New Brunswick who converged at the Riverview Fire station.

"The guys all had a good time," said Maria Northrup, training co-ordinator for the Southeastern Firefighters Association which put on the day which in turn attracted lots of onlookers and about 100 firefighters from all over this region all weekend long.

"Especially the student firefighters enjoyed it," Northrup said. "You don't want these guys to get into a live fire in order to learn how to fight a fire."

A specialized trailer, the insides of which erupt into flames for student firefighters and experienced ones alike to wage war against, took care of any need to have to dangerously train on fire-fighting techniques while actually on the job. With a flick of a switch, the interior of the trailer roars into flaming heat while the firefighters work to extinguish the flames. Should something go wrong, the flames can be put out remotely from the control module, with the touch of a button.

Almost all of this day's firefighters are volunteers, with a smattering of career fire-

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Firefighters attend training exercises in Riverview on Saturday

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fighters. Some will receive the training they need to finally attain their Level 1 certification. Many are instructors, happy to sacrifice a sunny weekend to share the tricks they've learned while performing their dangerous duties. The sense of camaraderie among the firefighters is actually tangible.

"It's very welcoming here at the Riverview Fire Department," Northrup said.

"There's no division between careers and volunteers."

As well, there are no "secret" techniques in the fire fighting business — everyone is eager to share what they've learned, Northrup stressed.

The association represents both volunteer and career firefighters in Albert, Westmorland and Kent counties. They are always setting up opportunities for training. Last month their session focused on fire prevention, something they stress.

This past weekend they worked on firefighting, auto extractions, hazardous materials techniques, water shuttling, accountability, incident command and many other hands-on skills such as the proper ways of carrying victims and lugging equipment while wearing close to 70 pounds, or 32 kilograms, of bunker gear.

Onlookers were struck by how the firefighters didn't rush to extract the dummy in the car accident. Rather, they took the utmost care not to cause more harm to the victim.

"You want that person to stay a patient, not a victim," Northrup explained.

"It all comes down to safety," and that includes the safety of the rescuers, she said, "because they need to come home safe from every scene."

Once, during an exercise, Northrup played the role of the trapped car-crash victim and got a victim's-eye view of what it's like to have your car cut away from around you. If ever there was a lesson to drive carefully, that was it, she said.

"What an experience," she exulted.

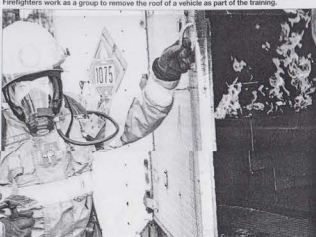
"And, when you're teaching these guys how to do this with a dummy in the car, it's not quite the same as having a person in there."

The association plans to allow high school students that same experience when they host their PARTY Program, which encourages young people not to drink and drive, later this spring. Northrup had high praise for Riverview's fire department and their eagerness for lending their time and expertise to such exercises.

"We certainly do get a whole lot of support from them."



Firefighters work as a group to remove the roof of a vehicle as part of the training.



Hillsborough firefighter Sheldon Milburn opens the door to a mobile fire fighting trainer at Riverview Fire and Rescue on Saturday.



The doors and roof of a car sit in a pile at Riverview Fire and Rescue on Saturday during a training day involving about 100 firefighters from several fire departments in southeastern N.B.



Local firefighter Vernon Woolsey cuts through a windshield at Riverview Fire and Rescue on Saturday during a training day involving about 100 firefighters from several fire departments in southeastern New Brunswick.



Firefighters from several fire departments take off the doors of a vehicle as they honed their emergency response skills over the weekend.



Firefighters work at removing the doors of a vehicle while wearing close to 70 pounds, or 32 kilograms, of bunker gear.



Firefighters work on a vehicle during training exercises.



A firefighter in full gear sits inside a vehicle during training exercises.