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E-COMMUNITIES
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HOME PAGE
REGISTER TOP NEWS
BUSINESS
COLUMNS
COMMENTARY
EDUCATION
ENTERTAINMENT
FOOD & WINE
HEALTH & FAMILY
HOME & GARDEN
INVESTIGATIONS
LIFE, ETC.
LOCAL
MULTIMEDIA
NATION & WORLD
OBITUARIES
REGION & STATE
SPECIAL FEATURES
SPORTS
TRAVEL
WEATHER

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Select an area

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- Discussion boards
- Financial tools
- Get a map
- Get directions
- Make this my home page
- Movie times
- Place a classified ad
- Puzzles & games
- Traffic
- Yellow pages

Information

- About us
- Contact us

Firefighters' lively investment

Pair turns federal terror-response manual into an interactive CD that they say is easier to learn from.

By **COURTNEY PERKES**

The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA – Firefighter Jon Muir spent a month slogging through a terrorism-response manual, 99 pages of bland, government-issue reading.

So he and another firefighter decided to invest \$70,000 to transform the book into a lively CD that would allow peers to hear wailing fire engines and see footage of the World Trade Center falling.

Last week, Muir and partner Jim Melton submitted their final version of Responder 911 software to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which produced the manual. The duo, along with multimedia programmer Cliff Goldman, hope FEMA will buy their product for nationwide distribution.

"The problem with fire department videos or books, they tend not to be realistic or interactive," said Muir, a 10-year department veteran. "It's hard to learn from them."

The purpose of the training is to prepare the first responders - firefighters, paramedics, police and public- health workers - for handling the scene of a terrorist attack.

The CD follows the manual - not restricted by copyright - word for word.

A commanding voice narrates the coursework. Users can take a practice test before registering online with FEMA to receive certification. The disc contains a glossary of terms for reference.

Although the unillustrated book mentions biological warfare and describes bacteria, the software gives the same definition plus a picture of bacteria under a microscope. The disc offers a view inside the cab of a fire engine, highlighting the names of equipment.

"It's pretty dramatic with the information and the music," said Michael Arlen, who is distributing the software as president of a Los Angeles medical training supply company. "I was very impressed."



PRODUCT: Santa Ana firefighters Jon Muir, left, and Jim Melton, right, with programmer Cliff Goldman, center, designed an interactive CD based on the U.S. government's terrorism-response manual.
MARK RIGHTMIRE, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

THE SOFTWARE

Santa Ana firefighters Jon Muir and Jim Melton developed Responder 911, computer software designed to train emergency personnel such as police, paramedics and public-health workers. All of the information comes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's terrorism-prevention manual. The software also includes scenes from Santa Ana Fire Department training. For more information, visit www.responder911.com.

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While manuals often collect dust, Muir and Melton say the CD can be completed in three hours and easily paused when firefighters dash out on calls.

"This information can be very dry when you're reading it," said Santa Ana fire Capt. Tim Graber, who is helping market the Responder 911 program. "This software just livens it up. It puts us right there."

Former fire Chief Marc Martin gave Muir and Melton permission to create the product on their own time. They began the project in January 2001, but the work took on new urgency with the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks as they watched television in disbelief at their fire station.

"When we saw the second plane, Jim and I knew we needed to continue and finish this," Muir said. "I said to him, 'This could happen in our back yard.' "

Muir and Melton were allowed to film department operations and equipment in exchange for free copies of the program.

FEMA spokeswoman Barbara Ellis said Friday that the program has been forwarded to the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Fire Administration.

So far Muir and Melton have focused on preparing their product for FEMA rather than marketing the software, which is available on their Web site for \$89.

Melton said more than half the nation's firefighters are volunteers often living in rural areas that lack uniform, specialized training.

"We want to try to give them an edge because their life depends on it," Melton said.

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