

The New Smyrna Beach (NSB) Medical Academy's Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Program (NEPP) teams' preparation for their tabletop exercise, Bioterrorism, at NSB HS, impressed the Fire Department personnel with their work. As a result, the Volusia County Fire Services Hazmat Team invited them to participate in a full scale exercise. The exercise was set up at the school with participation from students, preparedness faculty and the Fire Department.

Students train in hazmat routine

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News-Journal photos/MARK I. JOHNSON

Ryan Norville and William Hembling, seniors in New Smyrna Beach High School's medical academy first-responders class, try to patch a mock leaking pipe Feb. 16 during a hazardous-materials training session at the school with the Volusia County Fire Services Hazmat Team.

High school drill offers an inside look at the techniques of first responders

By MARK I. JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

NEW SMYRNA BEACH — Stepping out of the yellow-plastic hazmat suit, high school senior Sarah Lavallee glistened with sweat.

"I can't imagine doing that in the summertime," the New Smyrna Beach High School medical academy senior said about the job. "It is extremely hot."

Lavallee and more than two dozen of her "first-responder" classmates spent Feb. 16 getting hands-on experience about what goes into dealing with a hazardous-materials emergency.

The drill was coordinated as part of the medical academy's ongoing participation in the federal Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Program.

"This is part of the curriculum in how to deal with a biological-terrorism incident," academy instructor Cathleen Zois said.

While the exercise dealt with a chemical rather than a biological hazard, it still gave her students some insight into how to properly deal with such incidences.

"I have a lot more respect for what they (the Volusia County Fire Services Hazmat Team) do. I did not think it would be that difficult."

SARAH LAVALLEE
senior in the New Smyrna Beach High School medical academy

"I have a lot more respect for what they do," Lavallee said about members of the Volusia County Fire Services Hazmat Team who guided the high school students through the drill.

"I did not think it would be that difficult."

Members of the medical academy class were tasked with fixing a leaking pipe containing an unknown chemical, then ensuring each other was properly decontaminated once the job was done.

For Ryan Norville, the exercise showed him how difficult it is to work with common tools, such as a screwdriver, while wearing a hazmat suit, in addition to how many precautions first responders must take in such situations.

"I knew there were steps, but not that many," he said.

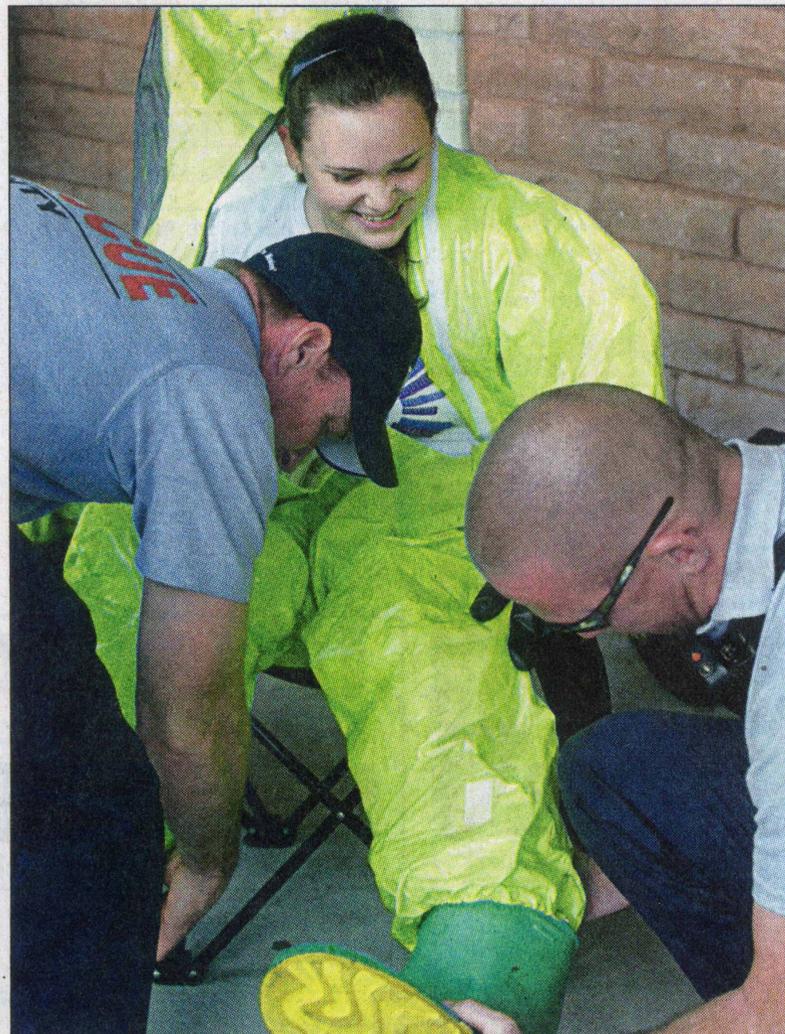
Unlike many of his fellow medical-academy participants, who are looking toward professional medical careers, Norville wants to be on the front lines of such an emergency as a firefighter.

"I like to help people," he said.

Whether a future cardiologist or paramedic, the students who participated in the exercise came away with a newfound understanding for what front-line responders do in an emergency and how they are trained to react to those emergencies.

"They got to walk through the hazmat process," fire Lt. Chris McKay said.

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Members of the county fire services team help Sarah Lavallee into a hazardous-materials training suit during the session Feb. 16 at New Smyrna Beach High.