

IDF Prepares Israeli City With Chemical Assault Drill

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Home Front Command held a wide-ranging exercise in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya on April 25 to prepare the local community for a chemical assault scenario. IDF medical teams, the Nahariya municipality and Health Ministry officials participated in the exercise, which involved the establishment of an emergency testing and treatment center (ETC) in case of a chemical attack.

Nahariya, a city in northern Israel only 9.6 kilometers (six miles) from the border of Lebanon, has often experienced warning sirens in the past, as it is well within the range of rockets launched from beyond Israel's northern border.

The ETC exercise took place at a local high school, led by department head for community health Lt. Col. Aviv Ohana.

"In times of chemical assault, many are bound to suffer from varying degrees of injuries," Ohana says. "Our goal here is to ease the work for the local hospital by taking on those who are lightly injured or with symptoms of post-traumatic stress. By doing this, we allow the hospitals to focus on casualties with more serious conditions without potential overcrowding."

The ETC drill involved 200 mock casualties, each of whom received a slip of paper with potential symptoms. The casualties went through the ETC in stations, as nurses and doctors—volunteers from all four of Israel's main health-care providers—checked their symptoms and directed each of them to the appropriate room for treatment.

"We are equipped to treat up to 1,000 injured citizens a day in times of emergency, either with light to moderate injuries or with symptoms of post-traumatic stress, as we have psychological and psychiatric services on hand as well," Ohana

says.

Preparing for Worst-Case Scenarios

ETC drills are part of the IDF's mission to prepare Israel's civilians against any threat to their safety. There are 25 ETCs across Israel—sites ranging from country clubs to gyms and schools—all of them located near hospitals. Every hospital and neighboring ETC in Israel must hold one of these exercises every three years, in order to prepare Israel for a chemical attack scenario.

"Every ETC has a replacement ETC so that, if the original was destroyed in any way during a strike, we would have another place to go that is prepared for an emergency situation," Ohana notes. "Today's exercise is in Nahariya's designated replacement ETC, and it is the first ever exercise being held here, so this is of great importance."

These drills represent a joint effort between the local citizens of Israel and the IDF, as the organizers, volunteers and mock casualties are represented by a range of Israel's citizens, from student volunteers and IDF soldiers to local government officials.

"These exercises display the very uniqueness of Israel, when everyone comes together and volunteers their time to help Israel prepare for chemical assaults, resulting in a wonderful combination of citizens and IDF soldiers," Ohana says.

Pvt. Lee and Pvt. Dana, soldiers in the IDF Intelligence Corps, volunteered to serve as mock casualties in this exercise.

"Everyone here knows it is important to try and replicate a real-life emergency incident as effectively as possible, which is why so much focus is going into these drills," Lee says.

"I chose to volunteer because the fact remains that Israel

must be prepared for chemical assault, and these drills are the way to prepare for such incidents," Dana says.

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