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Deputies train for SWAT operations

Jeremy Pittari
The Picayune Item

Twelve Pearl River County deputies have spent a week training to be prepared for any situation that will require swift law enforcement response.

The members of the Pearl River County Sheriff's Department have been training day and night under instructors with the Alternative Lethal Systems Technologies. Vice president of training for ALS Technologies Mike Aultman said the five-and-a-half-day's of training will give the men and woman ways to deal with hostage situations other than having to use only lethal force.

Some of the alternative options include use of bean bag or rubber rounds and chemical rounds such as gas bombs. The trainees were also trained in the use of traditional firearms.

Part of the training was to teach the officers how to make proper decisions on when to shoot or when not to shoot. They also learned about the human anatomy and how different rounds affect the body.

"They're going to be very good at what they do, but (lethal force has) got to be the last resort," Aultman said. The training period ended Nov. 6.



The purpose of SWAT training is to learn how to save lives, both of the hostage and the general public.

"It's not to save cop's lives, it's to save lives period," Aultman said.

Aultman said firearm use actually makes up the smallest part of the training. In the 70 hours of training, the deputies and investigators learned about the history of SWAT, how to set up a command post, containment, negotiations, vehicle training and school bus searches.

The training will come in handy not only during special situations, but will help each deputy and investigator during everyday job duties. The vehicle tactics training will enable deputies and investigators who come into contact with

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dangerous suspects to overwhelm the suspect, lessening the risks.

"You end it before it starts," Aultman said.

Aultman said the training helps every person in the department to be better at his or her job, from the road deputy to supervisor. The key is for the deputies and investigators to keep honing their skills, which are perishable. Sheriff David Allison said each person in the training intends to continue honing his or her skills once a month during free time.

This is not the first time a member of the department engaged in non-lethal SWAT training. Chief Deputy Shane Tucker said Chief Investigator Donnie Saucier has been through previous SWAT training that enables him to train fellow officers. Saucier also participated in this week's training since he will be the commander of the county's new SWAT team.

Saucier said even though he has been through SWAT training before, the training he participated in this week has been the best he's had. Having certified SWAT team members in the county will help the department serve the county by effectively handling high risk situations.

"Any situation that goes above and beyond the skills of the average deputy sheriff," Saucier said.

While this training was basic, Saucier said it has created a strong foundation on which the department can build. Aultman said basic training is a misleading term, since more advanced training is actually honing the skills learned in the basic training.

More SWAT training is planned, but not yet scheduled. Tucker said the department plans to send some deputies and investigators to sniper and negotiation training. Tucker said he is the only certified negotiator at the department.

Allison said the training for all 12 staff members cost the department about \$30,000, but \$25,000 of that was paid for with a Department of Homeland Security grant that was applied for by county Emergency Management Director Danny Manley. The balance, which covered all the supplies such as weapons, ammunition and gear, was paid for using drug forfeiture funds.

Allison said the training will help his department handle situations where suspects barricade themselves in a structure and threaten to use lethal force. Two such incidents took place recently, Allison said. One in the Ozona community and another on Springhill Road this past summer. Allison said during those incidents the department decided more training would allow them to better deal with future incidents.

This week's training had a variety of deputies and investigators participating, including a female detective, Christa Groom, and a registered nurse who is also the department's certified crime scene investigator, James Buie. Allison said having an RN on a SWAT team is a good idea, especially since nurses will deal with situations where people could get hurt. Aultman said Groom was trained along with the rest of the team and had no trouble keeping up.

The officers have been in training since early Sunday morning and will wind down Friday.

Allison said he would like to thank Manley for applying for the grant that helped pay for the training and the board of supervisors for approving the grant application.