

OIA ready for chemical-biological incident



Photos by MOURA STEINBERG

Two inflatable air tents provide separate decontamination areas for male and female casualties as part of a new Mass Casualty Decon System at Ontario International Airport. The decontamination system can clean 700 people per hour.

Airport first in country to get decontamination system

By **JIM STEINBERG**
Business Editor

Ontario International Airport has become the first airport in the nation to get a high-tech portable decontamination system that can clean 700 people per hour of biological and chemical toxins.

The Los Angeles World Airports, which owns and operates Ontario International, bought three of the \$220,000 Mass Casualty Decon Systems and gave the first to Ontario.

The system, which is housed in a trailer and pulled by a Ford F-450 crew cab diesel truck, would be used in the event of an industrial accident or terroristic incident where large numbers of people would need decontamination.

Peter L. Drinkwater, Ontario airport manager, said Thursday that he viewed the system as an asset for the Inland Empire and

it would be used outside the airport if needed.

Two others are expected to be in service at Los Angeles International Airport by the end of this year, said Dick Taylor, emergency preparedness coordinator for LAWA.

The decontamination trailer, manufactured by Modec Inc. of Denver, was displayed for the first time Wednesday night behind the old Ontario International Airport terminal during a board meeting of LAWA commissioners.

For a decade, Modec has made smaller versions of the system for Army and Marine forces. More recently, fire departments in cities that include Seattle, Atlanta, San Francisco and Jacksonville have purchased them, said Brian Kalamanka, Modec presi-

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Capt. Michael Allomong of the Ontario airport fire/rescue demonstrates using a scrub brush to remove contamination on a mannequin inside one of the Mass Casualty Decon System tents.

Trailer

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dent.

The Australian army has a contract with Modec to provide decontamination systems for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Units similar to the one at Ontario are part of Presidential Protection Services. They were on standby at the 1995 presidential inauguration and have been deployed at various international summits, Kalamanka said.

Speaking to the National Academy of Science earlier this year, President Clinton said that it is "highly likely" that a terrorist group will launch or threaten a germ or chemical attack on American soil within the next few years.

Clinton recognized the Mass Casualty Decon System deployed by the Arlington County Fire Department as a key element in bolstering local jurisdictions' capabilities to respond to a chemical-biological incident.

Next year, Modec expects to begin selling a special foam to lessen the effects of anthrax.

The foam was developed by Sandia Laboratories in Albuquerque, N.M.

The foam could be distributed by decontamination systems such as those based at the Ontario airport and LAX, Kalamanka said.

The system heats water to between 80 degrees and 95 degrees and adds a small amount of bleach. Occasionally other chemicals are added to the water, depending upon what toxic agent needs to be neutralized, Kalamanka said.

Water leaves the 32 discharge ports, both inside and outside the trailer, at 90 pounds per square inch of pressure, Kalamanka said.

Once the system arrives on the scene it can begin spraying the heated water in about 10 minutes, said Capt. Michael L. Allomong of the Ontario airport's fire/rescue service.

It will take another 10 minutes to deploy inflatable buildings on either side of the trailer.

Showers are inside the trailer and on exterior booms which extend on both sides.

The buildings provide privacy for people undergoing decontamination. Typically male victims take showers on one side of the trailer, while female victims use the other, Allomong said.

Later this month, hazardous materials handlers from throughout San Bernardino County will attend a session explaining the capabilities of the Modec machine, said Capt. Dan Lindsay, of the Ontario airport's fire/rescue service.

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