

Satsop Training Goes Nuclear

Local News

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Elma, WA - The site of the never-finished Satsop nuclear power plant has turned out to be a perfect place to train Army soldiers how to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction. "While we were over in Iraq, we would often reflect back to what we learned at Satsop," said Maj. John Gervais last week while training his company at Satsop Business Park. "The facility and what we can do here is great. You just can't replicate it," he said. Of course the "weapons" found are not real, but the elaborate scenarios created are as close to reality as possible to train the soldiers of the Army's 110th Battalion based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. The 110th Battalion is one of two CBRNE — chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive — battalions in the U.S. Army. The other CBRNE battalion is the 22nd based out of Aberdeen, MD.



The 110th Battalion, which was created in 2005 with the express purpose of eliminating weapons of mass destruction and any tasks that would support their elimination, has been quietly training at Satsop Business Park since 2007. "This place has been fantastic for us," said Lt. Col. Tamar Main last week while overseeing part of the week-long training exercise at Satsop. "It represents unique challenges — from the maze of 5-foot thick concrete walls, which create communication challenges, to an amazing tunnel network. There are vertical descents with stairways and places we can practice confined space rescue," he said, adding that some companies have even taken advantage of the cooling towers, ascending more than 700 stairs for physical training — a nearly 500-foot vertical climb. "We can also communicate back

to Fort Lewis, which is a fairly realistic distance that you would find in the field. Also we can stay right here for the week. The low cost is also a factor," Main said. Typically while at Satsop, the soldiers take part in a variety of problem-solving scenarios. Basically each is designed to help them recognize threats accurately, determine what they're dealing with — biological, nuclear, chemical, etc. — and respond appropriately without hurting themselves, while preserving the crime scene and while following strict FBI protocol preserving a chain of custody for the evidence. Often this is done in the dark, deep underground in the nuclear reactor building or in the Park's 12-foot diameter, 1,300-foot long tunnel system that can easily simulate a sewer network, rail tunnel, or even a cave. Various "enemies" armed with 9 mm paintball guns, booby traps and other real-life obstacles may or may not be lurking in nooks and crannies as the soldiers work in small teams to complete their mission in a limited amount of time. "The soldiers love coming here to train. . . . For our purposes, this is top-notch," said Gervais who was running his company through three different scenarios at the Park last week. "We love having the Army train here," said Stan Ratcliff, director of services at Satsop Business Park, who works closely with the Army to give them access to various unique buildings and opportunities for the soldiers to train. He even provides the schematics of the 500,000-square-foot nuclear reactor building so they can plan their scenarios from the base. "They train about 15 to 20 weeks a year here. It is also a good source of revenue for us," Ratcliff said. "They are low impact on the site. They utilize unique structures that there is no other obvious use for. And, we're taking some of the money we receive from them to continue to develop our training abilities here such as adding power and lights to parts of the building." In addition to the Army, other entities are using Satsop Business Park for a variety of training — from fire districts and law enforcement agencies to hazard materials classes to tunnel training for construction workers. But Ratcliff sees the potential for much, much more including a permanent resident training center someday soon. "We hope to help more agencies do their training. We could accommodate everything from the Drug Enforcement Administration to train how to find meth labs to spill cleanup companies to rescuers practicing high-angle rescues," he said, adding that in the past some have used the Park's 1,200 acres of forest for training scenarios as well. *Satsop Business Park is a 1,700-acre mixed-use business and technology park located in scenic Grays Harbor County in Southwest Washington just 30 minutes from Olympia and the I-5 corridor. It is home to more than 30 businesses, offers 440 acres of developed, pad-ready land and buildings supported by super-sized infrastructure and surrounded by 1,200 acres of sustainable managed forestland. The Park is managed by the Grays Harbor Public Development Authority, a public corporation whose mission is to create new jobs and investment for the region. More information on Satsop Business Park can be found at www.Satsop.com.*