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Cutting-edge opportunity

By Sandra T. Molina Staff Writer

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Firefighters hose down a simulator car fire and rescue a test dummy during the Hydrogen Fuel Cell course at the Rio Hondo College Fire Academy in Santa Fe Springs on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2010. The free course is sponsored by the United States Department of Energy for local officials and fire departments. (SGVN/Staff photo by Watchara Phomicinda/SWCity)

SANTA FE SPRINGS - With the growing use of hydrogen as a fuel throughout the country, the U. S. Department of Energy has developed hydrogen safety training for first-responders.

Photo Gallery: [Hydrogen Fuel Cell course](#)

On Wednesday, the Rio Hondo College Fire Academy hosted the second of three courses in hydrogen fuel cell firefighting.

The eight-hour course, sponsored by the DOE for local officials, fire departments and Rio Hondo fire cadets, included classroom instruction, group exercises involving incident scenarios, a quiz, and a hands-on, live-fire exercise using a fuel cell vehicle "burn prop."

"Training for first-responders is designed to educate them about the unique properties of hydrogen and the special characteristics of fuel cells and hydrogen vehicles," said Tracy Rickman, Rio Hondo Fire Academy wildland and fire coordinator.

"It also provides appropriate safety and emergency response information," he said.

In addition to the fire cadets, the fire departments of Santa Fe Springs, San Gabriel and Los Angeles County participated in the program.

"We want to be on top of any safety issues," said San Gabriel Fire Chief Joe Nestor, of his department's participation.

"We're appreciative of DOE's providing this program for our region," he said.

This is the first time it has been conducted outside of Washington state, said Richard Kallman, environmental protection specialist for the Santa Fe Springs Department of Fire-Rescue.

"By participating in this training, our personnel will be better equipped to handle an incident involving this type of fuel," he said.

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The course combined classroom training, which discussed properties of hydrogen and applications in transportation and stationary power, with emergency response training modules and group scenario exercises.

"This is an exciting opportunity for Rio Hondo College to not only provide valuable training to our students, but also to regional fire departments and public safety units in our community as well," said Ted Martinez Jr., Rio Hondo president.

"We are very grateful to the Department of Energy for this cutting-edge opportunity."

Integral to the course, Rickman said, is the hands-on exercise with a mobile, full-size hydrogen fuel cell vehicle prop built by Kidde Fire Trainers for the DOE.

"The prop allows the trainers to safely simulate many scenarios, giving firefighters a realistic sense of hydrogen properties under emergency response conditions," he said.

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