

HAZSIM CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

HAZMAT TRAINING EXPERT CASEY JONES

Ensuring hazmat students are engaged and learning requires breaking down material into digestible bites, fresh, realistic hands-on scenarios and verifying student understanding.

Casey Jones is a 20-year emergency services veteran including 13 years with the Little Rock (Ark.) Fire Department. He is a lead hazmat instructor not just in the city, but the county and state too. He also trains hazmat instructors on a national level. Casey sat down with us to share his insights on how to make hazmat training effective, relevant, and engaging.



Little Rock's Hazmat Team

- **Dedicated hazmat unit with 4 full time personnel**
- **Average 2.7 responses per shift**
- **2 additional station units trained to technician level**
- **Can immediately deploy up to 24 technician-trained personnel**
- **County hazmat team with full and part time personnel from throughout the city**

What hazmat threats lie within Little Rock?

Working in the largest city in Arkansas, the industrial environment gives us a large array of potential hazards. We have several cold-storage facilities which house large volumes of ammonia near residential areas, a natural gas pipeline that runs through downtown, millions of gallons/pounds in transported goods via rail, river and highway, as well as numerous political offices and entertainment events that are sensitive to hazmat and/or weapons of mass destruction threats.

How many students do you have? What is your training facility like?

At LRFD, I instruct over 400 personnel to the operations level and over 75 to the technician level. We host regular training for our personnel in the form of scenarios and drills. We are lucky to have a large training facility with natural gas, highway tanker, railcar, WMD and confined space props to include in our scenarios.



When training technician level responders, I focus more on mission-specific drills and scenarios. For example, they will not only recognize an incident involving hazardous materials, but they will also identify the material and take measures to contain and mitigate the release.

Besides my fire department career, I am also an instructor for the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and the Arkansas Fire Academy. I deliver classes at conferences across the US such as HotZone and IAFC's Hazmat Conference.

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How do you keep training scenarios from becoming predictable or stale?

To keep responders interested and engaged in training, it has to be relevant and fun. You can't have them do the same pretend scenario over and over and expect them to be proficient or confident at their job. While following NFPA 472 and OSHA 1910.120, we have put together a scenario playbook that uses many of the potential incidents we could respond to, both locally and as mutual aid throughout the state. We compound this effect with tours or training at the actual sites when possible.

What's the key to best preparing responders to handle real scenarios outside of the controlled training environment?

To me, it comes down to how you train and what you train with. You can't just sit around and talk about "what ifs", you have to get out and place boots on the ground and equipment in their hands. Having a knowledge base is great, but personnel need to see and feel how environments are affected by products. This is where having realistic training equipment, like the HazSim system, can really improve the capabilities and effectiveness of a hazmat team.

What is your biggest obstacle when conducting hazmat training?

Having all personnel on the same page. A large-scale hazmat incident is rarely a single agency response, and having everyone trained to the same level is hard. Many agencies do not have the same equipment or capabilities, hence, it is hard for all personnel to train with the same equipment and level of understanding.



How do you get around it?

For us, we were lucky enough to purchase several HazSim systems for our department and the county hazmat team. These units give us the ability to train our own personnel and surrounding agencies with the same equipment. Thus, everyone learns on the same platform and understands what is going on during a real incident.

What devices do you rely on most for realistic training?



One of the best pieces of training equipment we use for realistic training is the HazSim Pro 2.0. Being able to put a responder in a suit, send them into an unfamiliar building, and then place real-time readouts on their HazSim allows us to see how they will react in real incidents. And the versatility of the system allows us to train on chemicals, radiation or gaseous environments without switching equipment.

Do you alter training for new responders versus seasoned veterans?

New responders typically need repeated reminders and simple instructions to get a grasp of training and to remember information, while veteran responders need more in-depth understanding and detailed training scenarios to test their knowledge, skills and abilities.

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How do you keep the classroom portion fresh?

Unfortunately, this is far too easy with all the events happening throughout the world today. There seems to be a never-ending supply of videos or news reports of incidents involving hazardous materials or WMDs. I try to incorporate as many of these as I can, especially if they are similar to events that could happen in the local area.

What's been your biggest "ah-ha" teaching moment?

This happened my second time teaching as a new instructor years ago. After two days of teaching a hazmat operations course, one student came up to me and asked when I was teaching again. When I asked why, he stated he wanted to sit through the class again because he didn't understand everything and felt the information was a little over his head. I instantly felt like I had failed that student.



As an instructor, I have attended multitudes of classes and have years of experience to pull from when teaching, but I found out quickly that I needed to convey it better. Albert Einstein once said that, "if you can't explain something simply, you don't understand it well enough." It was in that moment that I started making sure I broke information down to the level of learner verses trying to pull them up to mine.

What role does technology play in how you teach and what does the future hold?

The possibilities are endless for the future of hazmat training. While we use videos, monitors and simulators now, virtual reality is quickly coming onto the scene. I think we will soon see our current devices incorporated into VR and an even more realistic training environment created.

What advice do you have for new hazmat instructors?

It's not about you; it's about them. It doesn't matter how much you know or how many years of experience you have; it only matters how well you prepare your students for the level of training they are receiving.

What advice can you offer seasoned hazmat instructors whose teaching may be in a rut?

We can become just as complacent as everyone else, especially when it comes to refresher training. Students often dislike recertifying and instructors may see this as an opportunity to skim over material. Ultimately though, it is our responsibility to prepare them for the unexpected world of hazmat. Keep the training relative and make it fun.

Is hazmat for everyone?

No. Hazmat response isn't a one-and-done training course. This type of emergency response is always evolving, whether by the products involved, the way they are transported, or the training needed to respond to them. Personnel need regular and relevant training to safely and effectively be part of hazmat team.

