

Mock Prison Riot

What's New in 2010

By Cynthia R. Barone, Sharon Goudy and Brian Higgins

Authors' Note: Findings and conclusions reported in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Once again, riot, mayhem, and a chance to experience cutting-edge law enforcement and corrections technologies in action took place in West Virginia. The 14th Annual Mock Prison Riot, "Where Technology Meets Mayhem," was held May 2-5, 2010, on the grounds of the former West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville.

The Mock Prison Riot provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity for manufacturers to showcase emerging law enforcement, corrections, homeland security, and military technologies and for law enforcement and corrections professionals to test those technologies in simulated real-world scenarios that include prison breaks, mass disasters and terrorist attacks. The event is an initiative of the West Virginia High Technology Consortium (WVHTC) Foundation, and is funded by the National Institute of Justice.

The Mock Prison Riot has been staged annually since 1997, and has grown from a one-day to a five-day event (including the skills competition, which is hosted and managed by the West Virginia Division of Corrections Special Operations Unit). This year, the riot had 1,422 attendees from 44 states and 16 foreign countries. Countries represented at the riot for the first time in 2010 included Bangladesh, Germany, Hong Kong, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal and Yugoslavia. One hundred sixteen exhibitors participated, and more than 380 police officers took part in 70 scenarios.

Highlights of the 2010 Mock Prison Riot included many activities of interest to NIJ. An NIJ-funded intelligent video

system that facilitates detection and tracking of people, events and behaviors across large camera networks was tested. Its capabilities include automatic analysis of crowd motion patterns and automatic detection of social network information, including gang activities. Corrections officers and criminal justice students executed several scenarios to depict common activities in prison recreation yards. Data were gathered on social networking, gang activity, preassault activity and contraband transfer markers. A high-resolution video surveillance system to determine potential product applications in outdoor areas of a correctional institution was deployed, in addition to emergency communications platforms to provide WiMAX coverage for the venue and hardware support for the intelligent video system. This deployment was part of a project to evaluate emerging WiMAX standards and their potential applications for public safety communications. Less-lethal technologies, including a nonlethal stun projectile and a pressurized water-based application for fire suppression and crowd control, were demonstrated.

This year, as in past years, the event included tactical training scenarios; technology assessments and evaluations; exhibits by technology manufacturers; workshops (including opportunities for certification); skills competitions; and multiple opportunities for feedback and networking.

Training Scenarios

Participants had the opportunity to execute training scenarios that allowed them to see, feel and deploy new technologies in a controlled environment that simulated the most dangerous conditions they might face. All areas of the prison were available for scenarios, including the cell blocks, dining hall, indoor and outdoor recre-

ation areas, infirmary, office, apartment, chapel, school bus, and basement. Volunteers played roles in the scenarios as inmates, hostages, hostage takers, officers and others. Scenarios that involved high-risk cell extractions and K-9 units were limited to team participants.

With help from the Mock Prison Riot staff, teams were encouraged to create their own scenarios based on training needs. Also, teams coordinated with exhibitors and staff to incorporate technologies showcased in the exhibits. The ability to deploy new technologies on the spot provided useful feedback for both technologists and law enforcement professionals.

Tactical teams are strongly encouraged to debrief in two parts following every scenario. Part one of the debriefing process includes direct feedback to the developer regarding the technology that was deployed during the exercise. Team members offer feedback on a particular technology's strengths, areas for improvement, effectiveness and ease of use. Technology developers capture and analyze the feedback and implement changes to their technologies accordingly. Part two of the debriefing process involves the tactical team leader critiquing his or her team's execution: Was the mission accomplished in a safe and effective manner? Many teams have their own criteria against which they judge and measure performance. However, the Mock Prison Riot staff provide a general process outline for debriefing for newly formed teams or teams that may not have a process in place.

Scenarios executed in 2010 included a riot in the recreation yard between two rival prison gangs involving more than 70 inmates and weapons. Disturbance control teams used distraction devices, chemical munitions, and SIM rounds to restrain and separate the inmates. In another scenario, five inmates barricaded themselves in the

kitchen, fabricating weapons, and injuring a correctional officer and civilian staff. Teams totaling 30 officers secured the area; extracted the injured and provided medical treatment; and subdued the inmates and returned them to their cells.

Workshops

This year, the technology showcase included booths for 116 exhibitors that featured police departments; manufacturers of law enforcement and corrections technologies and the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety. Special emphasis was placed on technology areas designated by NIJ as high priority.

Thirty-five workshop sessions were held, including a number of repeat sessions that showcased various technologies. Sessions lasted one hour to a full day, but most were a half day. Workshop subjects ranged from an introduction to biometrics to self-defense tactics and police combat training, and included suspect and witness interview techniques,

techniques for cell entry and extraction of violent and noncompliant prisoners, tactical emergency care, and tactical command training for critical incidents. User certifications were offered for explosives, chemical munitions, pepperball launchers and distraction devices, and instructor certification was offered in the use of chemical aerosols.

Attendance and Cost

Mock prison riots are not open to the public. Only active or retired law enforcement and corrections practitioners, support personnel, and the military (active or retired) can attend. Criminal justice students are admitted if they are enrolled in an accredited college or university and are under the supervision of an instructor/academic official. Identification is required.

All events at mock prison riots are free for participants, exhibitors and observers. Attendees must pay for their own transportation, lodging and meals. The safety guidelines prohibit such items as live ammunition, explo-

sive devices, conducted energy devices and chemical agents.

For more information on safety guidelines and other requirements, visit www.mockprisonriot.org. Visitors to the site can find full details about events and see video and media coverage of previous years' mock prison riots.

For general information about the event, exhibitors and the media should contact Cindy Barone at (304) 230-7349; cbarone@mockprisonriot.org. Teams interested in attending future riots and those who want information on scenarios, workshops and the skills competition should contact Sharon Goudy at (304) 230-7314; sgoudy@mockprisonriot.org.

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