

# media release

SA Metropolitan Fire Service



## Six-storey Collapse Tests State's Rescue Capability

8 December 2008

Emergency services and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) specialists including a canine search team will tomorrow attempt to locate and rescue casualties trapped beneath tonnes of rubble from a collapsed multi-storey building – but thankfully it's just a test.

MFS District Officer Colin Lindsay says the 48-hour exercise, at the MFS Training Centre at Angle Park, is the culmination of a three-week intensive training program and will showcase and test the State's emergency response and USAR capabilities.

"Urban Search and Rescue is a system for organising emergency response personnel from several agencies into an integrated, highly skilled and equipped Taskforce capable of responding to major structural collapse," said District Officer Lindsay.

"Course participants have undergone training in both the theoretical and practical aspects of how to stabilise and shore up a collapsed building, release and treat trapped people, and decontaminate the site.

"Tomorrow's exercise scenario replicates the collapse of a six-storey multi-tenancy building complex following seismic activity. Unconfirmed reports point to workers and visitors trapped and the possibility of further earth tremors and gas explosions.

"The USAR team of engineers, paramedics, Hazmat technicians and senior rescuers will be deployed. The USAR technicians will then use a broad range of specialist equipment such as fibre-optic cameras, acoustic listening devices, concrete cutting and drilling tools, hydraulic and pneumatic lifting equipment along with tunnelling and shoring gear, combined with the highly sensitive noses of the USAR dogs, to identify where and how casualties are trapped and extricate them.

"The 48-hour exercise certainly tests their specialist skills, teamwork, endurance and physical and mental strength," said District Officer Lindsay.

While the full USAR Taskforce has not been deployed in Adelaide since development of the capability began in 2006, District Officer Lindsay says exercises such as these are critical in building the capacity to deal with incidents of this type.

"International experience shows that about 80% of casualties are removed by initial rescue efforts by emergency services and the local community. More profoundly trapped casualties require the specialised equipment and technical expertise of the USAR Taskforce," said District Officer Lindsay.

"This capability is not only vital in the case of certain natural disasters – such as earthquakes – but would also be essential in the event of a terrorist attack such as occurred in Okalahoma City in the U.S. as well as other building collapses as a result of accidental causes such as vehicle collisions with buildings, construction faults or explosions caused by gas leaks."

"There are always advancements in search and rescue techniques and equipment so it is critical that the State's technicians are continually trained and challenged so they are ready at a moment's notice."

South Australia's USAR training program is recognised as one of the best in Australia. Twenty-four trainees from the MFS, SES, SAAS, along with firefighters from the ACT and NT, will be involved in this exercise, bringing the number of SA trained technicians to 136. Amongst the trainees is Peter Mason, an experienced officer with more than 25 years' experience in the fire service, and Nobiyuki Fukuda, a recent MFS recruit. Emergency Services Minister Michael Wright will also observe part of the exercise on Wednesday.

**WHAT:** 48-hour Urban Search and Rescue Exercise  
**WHEN:** Exercise runs from 11 am Tuesday, 9 December – Wednesday, 10 December,  
**WHERE:** MFS Training Centre, Gate 4, 48 Grand Junction Road, Angle Park  
**VISION:** For access and interviews, please contact the MFS Media Line on 8204 3770.