

City of Brigantine Fire Department

DIVE TEAM TRAINING COMPLETED

13 members of the Brigantine Fire Department, 1 member of the Brigantine Police Department, 1 dual member of the Pleasantville and Scullville Fire Departments (Scullville Volunteer Fire Department provided the use of their \$225,000 Fire Boat for dive operations) and 3 members of the Hamilton Township Rescue Squad dive team completed five days of intensive training last week June 14 through 18, learning large area search, rescue and recovery diving, as well as small boat rescue/handling and boat operational diving, and focused on safely diving in strong currents from a dive platform boat away from any shoreline. The training occurred in Brigantine, and was coordinated through the Brigantine Fire Department.

The training was conducted by Lifeguard Systems Inc, and its' owner, world renown SCUBA diving expert Walt "Butch" Hendrick. He, along with Tony Mastroni, a retired Newark Firefighter, and Bryan Duffer, a dive master from Montgomery County Fire Department, Maryland, completed the instruction of these members, who operate jointly with one another as county wide emergency responders for all underwater incidents in the area through the Atlantic County Office of Emergency Management.

Lifeguard Systems trains emergency response dive teams all over the United States and the globe, and Hendrick has authored numerous books on the subject, published in 6 different languages.

The classes and instruction were provided through the Atlantic County Office of Emergency Management, and were paid for with money provided by that office.

The training included over 12 hours of classroom instruction, along with 4 days of hands on training. Two days were spent on the use of a GPS in order to accurately pinpoint areas searched in a large water area (within 6 feet), as well as operation and anchoring of a dive platform boat, in order to assure accurate search procedures where the dive platform boat remains in the same position, no matter how strong the current and/or wind. The system used to anchor is also known as "hurricane anchoring" due to its' reliability in extremely rough and unfavorable water and weather conditions.

Also, members learned how to operate smaller "support" boats in order to safely transport and deploy, as well as pick up the rescue divers in a strong current/rough water environment. In addition, all the members received additional instruction on "tending" a diver, documentation, safety, and scene management.

The last 3 days covered actual diving and documentation of a large area for search and recovery of water accident victims. Each rescue diver is shuttled from land out to the dive platform boat, attached to a tether line, and once deployed, through a succession of hand signals, the personnel on the dive boat instruct the diver where to go, what to do,

and then document what areas under water have been successfully searched. They also keep track of the divers' time under water, air consumption, and time in the water, and assist the diver in donning and doffing their equipment, as well as communicating with scene management on the shoreline, to ensure safe and efficient public safety dive operations.

All of the training is safety oriented, and each diver descends into the water with a backup diver, ready to dive if needed, in the water at the dive platform boat, as well as a 90% contingency diver waiting to deploy if they are needed from on the platform boat.

All of the rescuers worked on the support boats, as well as in the water, simulating dive operations, and learning different aspects of the operation from the shore, where a majority of the coordination of a large area water rescue/recovery occurs.

The City of Brigantine has had a complete public safety water response team in existence since June of 1990, when Lifeguard Systems completed their initial training of the members of the Brigantine team.

All of the team members that were trained last week will now provide automatic assistance to one another when a call goes out for their services in Atlantic County.

For more information and pictures from this training, as well as information about our department, visit our web site www.bb-nj.org and click onto the Fire Department link, or visit the Department's union Facebook page at Brigantine Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 2657.