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## Disaster Training Center Opens *Hopes to Have National Draw*

by SHAWN R. BEALS The Hartford Courant

WINDSOR LOCKS — The New England Disaster Training Center opened Thursday, and its unique training stations will get their first use at the end of the month when a major federal group comes to train.

Officials hope to draw emergency responders from across the country to use the facility at Camp Hartell, the Connecticut National Guard's supply distribution point and one of its maintenance facilities.

Mobile field hospital drills, rubble pile search and rescue, trench rescue, train derailment and K-9 courses are part of the center's curriculum.

"My hope is that we never, ever have to use any of [the training], ... but we have to practice, and we have to be prepared," said Gov. M. Jodi Rell at a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday.

Emergency personnel will be able to practice crucial parts of disaster response there for many kinds of emergency situations, from train derailments to building collapses.

"It brings all the elements of rescue together if you do a big exercise," said the facility's director, retired Maj. Gen. James M. Skiff. "When the time comes, you're glad to have the people ready. This gives Connecticut a great enhancement to our first responders."

At least a dozen state agencies will train students from across the country at the center. Officials said the disaster training center will benefit the local economy because the students will stay at area hotels and eat at area restaurants.

"Preparations are currently under way to receive over 250 National Disaster Medical System team members who are coming to our training center to conduct Eastern Regional Field Training exercises at the end of this month," said Maj. Gen. Thaddeus Martin, adjutant general of the Connecticut National Guard.

The construction during the past year was funded through an \$8 million federal grant, and officials hope to keep operating the facility with other grants, said Michael Purcaro, chief of administration for the state Department of Public Health. Some classes may involve a fee, he said.

Purcaro said the federal training exercises later in July will help bring the center "a level of awareness and credibility" to draw other groups.

"Local, state and federal officials on the civilian and military side are working together to make this facility work. That's what's unique about our training center," Purcaro said.