

Jane's

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International procurement for police and state security

Cross-border hits

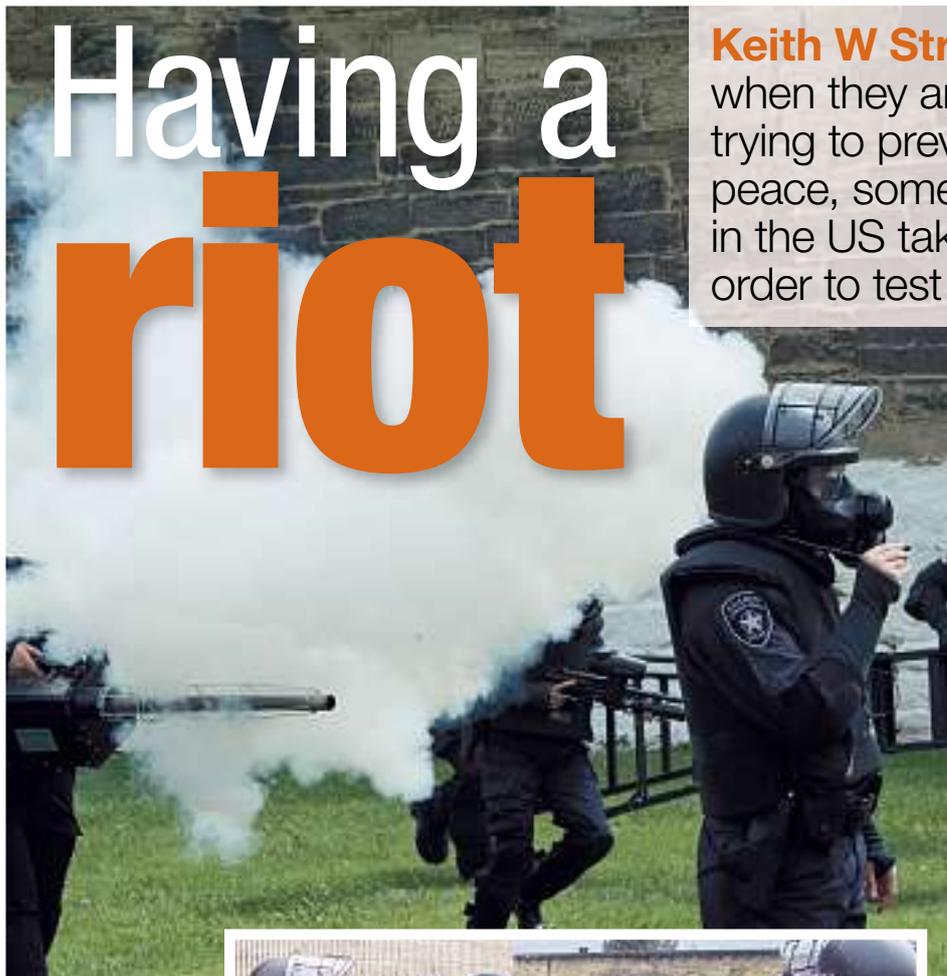
Sharing fingerprint data in the EU

Joined-up thinking

Making the most of Airwave

Having a riot

Keith W Strandberg discovers that, when they are not spending their time trying to prevent disturbances of the peace, some law enforcement officers in the US take part in mock riots in order to test out the latest technology



A fight breaks out in the prison cafeteria and it quickly turns into a full-blown riot. Three hostages – correctional officers – are taken. The entire prison is locked down and the leaders of the riot refuse to talk to the negotiator, except to threaten the hostages with death.

You, the correctional emergency response team (CERT) commander, get the order from the warden to go in and liberate the hostages and secure the area. Tear-gas canisters are shot into the cafeteria, along with ‘flash bangs’ (stun grenades), and the assault begins.

On your command, the CERT team thunders into the cafeteria, quickly locating the hostages and freeing them, while controlling the inmates, who are now choking on the gas and have lost the will to fight.

One inmate, the leader and a member of the prison’s most dangerous gang, is still on the loose somewhere in the prison. He has pepper spray and a baton, and one hostage. The hostage is injured and not moving.

Using less-lethal rounds, you and your team have to find and neutralise the inmate, and rescue the hostage.

What do you do? The clock is ticking...

RIOTOUS BEHAVIOUR: Participants at the Mock Prison Riot test the latest personal protection equipment to quell rioting ‘inmates’



Chance to network

This is just one of many scenarios at the Mock Prison Riot, an event in West Virginia, US, that has been held annually since 1997. The US National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the West Virginia High Technology Consortium (WVHTC) Foundation host the Mock Prison Riot on the grounds of the former West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville.

The Mock Prison Riot makes it possible for law enforcement and correctional officers to witness and try out emerging law enforcement and corrections technology.

The event features tactical training scenarios, technology demonstrations, free workshops, and the chance to network and learn from officers from across the US and from around the world. Teams of officers can take any of the technology showcased



and deploy them throughout the prison compound in tactical training scenarios that are designed by the teams themselves for training purposes.

The companies presenting new technology get immediate feedback from the teams based on their first-hand experiences and can use it to make modifications and improvements.

The first Mock Prison Riot, in 1997, lasted one day, had an attendance of 70, showcased four different technologies and offered three scenarios. By contrast, in 2009 the Mock Prison Riot was held over a four-day weekend (3 to 6 May 2009) and had 1,600 attendees, 127 technologies and 75 scenarios.

Cindy Barone, project manager for the Mock Prison Riot, says: 'The needs of the law enforcement and corrections community have changed. When they register for the riot, they tell us what training they need. We do not dictate scenarios to the teams, they submit them to us based on what they need and what they would like in training.

'When we get the scenarios in, we review them for safety and we look at what technologies have registered and see what would be a good fit. We then let the tactical teams try out the technologies and give immediate feedback to the technologists on how they worked.'

The Mock Prison Riot is not open to the general public, but it is open to exhibitors whose technology is related to the fields of law enforcement, corrections, military and homeland security.

Official law enforcement agency or corrections identification must be shown prior to admittance. Criminal justice students are admitted if they are enrolled in an accredited college or university and are under the supervision of an instructor or academic official. These students are often used as 'actors' in the scenarios, playing the parts of hostages and inmates, for example.

Workshops and scenarios

The workshops offered at the Mock Prison Riot are free and include sessions on strategy, certification and more. Some of the workshops at the 2009 event included: PepperBall launchers user certification; Taser XREP instructor certification; US export controls – a holistic approach; fitness for law enforcement and corrections; first responder protocol; introduction to biometrics; tactical breaching; and tactical emergency care. In addition to workshops, there are scenarios

going on all throughout the prison grounds, training officers on how to react when confronted with certain situations. The cell blocks, cafeteria, yards and offices are used throughout the event, with officers using the real-world location of the prison to experiment with tactics, technologies and theories in a way they could never do in an operating prison.

In the scenarios, training devices such as stun grenades, inert gas and inert smoke are provided free of charge based on exhibitor participation and contribution. No live ammunition or live chemical agents are permitted for use in any scenario, but participants can ask to use any product they see showcased.

'Our exhibitors actively seek the feedback of the end-users who attend this event,' Ms

technologies that could ultimately help them do their jobs better.

This co-operation is critical and is a big part of the success of the Mock Prison Riot: people who develop new technologies and new products can allow officers to use their products in 'next-to-real' situations, observe the results and talk to the participants to get their immediate feedback.

'The benefit for the teams that come here is that they get the training that they want,' Ms Barone says. 'The technologists get to see how their products are being used in the real world and also see how well they work.

'There are benefits to everyone. Even the observers who just watch get a benefit – they have access to the showcase where they can see the technologies and talk to the people who invented them. A company

'By working together, participants are helping to shape the future of tactics and technologies on a global scale'

Barone says. 'They tell us it is critical to the product development cycle. By working together, participants are helping to shape the future of tactics and technologies in the law enforcement and corrections industry on a global scale.'

Sgt Robert Brooks, of Chatham County Sheriff's Department in Savannah, Georgia, says: 'This was the most realistic training that my team could ever receive. The benefit that my department will take from the Mock Prison Riot is to watch other teams and get new ideas for training.

'We tailored our scenarios to fit our facility, plus got to see and use new technologies and give our feedback. 'We need to move ahead the technology and it is the most realistic training you can get.'

In addition, part of the Mock Prison Riot includes competitions. 'Each year our skills competition consists of several scenarios designed to test skills, training, endurance, and teamwork,' Ms Barone says.

'From marksmanship to hostage rescues, to our obstacle course, our competitions are exciting and challenging every year.'

Critical co-operation

Clearly, the opportunity to do very realistic training is a prime benefit of the Mock Prison Riot. At the same time, however, officers get a chance to participate in developing

like Taser, for example, introduced two new technologies last year to test them with the teams and get the feedback, then they made modifications.

'Defenseshield is another example: when technologist Collins White came to the riot, teams got back to him with feedback on his ballistic shields – they were too big and too heavy. He made changes and now he is selling to law enforcement and the military around the world.'

ReconRobotics is a robotics company looking to showcase its products to law enforcement, corrections and military customers. So, David Thomas, director of sales, brought his wares to the Mock Prison Riot. 'Our experience at the Mock Prison Riot was very good because of the exposure to a large market sector,' he says.

The future

The Mock Prison Riot has been going strong for more than 10 years and all signs point to it being continued.

'We are now talking about where the Mock Prison Riot goes from here,' Ms Barone says. 'This year, we had 127 technologies, we had the maximum amount of teams coming and we were at capacity.

'The National Institute of Justice supports it completely and would like to see it continue.' ■