

Simulator sharpens shooting skills

Authorities weigh when, whether to fire

By Julie Arrington

Staff Writer

juliearrington@forsythnews.com

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A firearms training simulator made a stop recently at the Georgia State Patrol post in northern Forsyth County.

Sgt. Dan Stephens with the state patrol travels with the simulator to posts throughout the state. He said the training allows troopers to sharpen their decision-making skills.

"It doesn't teach them how to shoot, but it teaches them when and the principles to apply," Stephens said.

He said the patrol has used the simulator for seven years. It cost the state about \$375,000.

From the outside, the simulator resembles a metal mobile home, but inside is a control booth and a room equipped with a large video screen and barricades.

Stephens explained that troopers who go through the training are given various video scenarios that force them to decide if the person on the screen is a threat.

Troopers use a Glock handgun mock-up that shoots fake bullets, known as airmunition, at the screen in the event that firing a weapon is necessary.

If they connect with their target, the video responds accordingly.

But if the person on the screen has a firearm and shoots, an instructor in the control booth can aim a cannon at the trooper going through the training.

The Teflon "bullets" don't really hurt, he said, but they give troopers a more realistic understanding of what it's like to be in a gunfight.

Each session is recorded and troopers can watch with instructors to evaluate their performance in the situation.

The simulator, he said, is "as real as it gets." The training, which takes about an hour, includes a review of many skills authorities learn during police academy.



Stephens said those who use the simulator are evaluated on a variety of skills including proper breathing techniques, known as tactical breathing, verbal commands and drawing weapons properly.

Also measured are marksmanship and judgment of when to make and withhold shots.

Stephens said the training is offered to members of other law enforcement agencies when time allows. Deputies from the Forsyth and Lumpkin County sheriff's offices have participated, as well as officers from North Georgia College & State University and investigators with the District Attorney's Office for the Northeastern Judicial Circuit, which includes nearby Dawson and Hall counties.

Stephens thinks the simulator offers some of the best training available because officers receive guidance from two instructors during the sessions.

He said the simulator's next stop will be the state patrol post in Hinesville, along the Georgia coast.

"Generally it takes me about 18 months to go from one end of the state to the other," he said. "And that's giving every sworn officer one hour inside the simulator."