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First Responders Prepare for Bird Flu

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COLUMBIA - Emergency first responders handle a variety of situations and took Thursday to train for more.

Local emergency workers are starting now to prepare for virulent diseases later. Thursday they learned how to handle an outbreak of avian flu among local residents.

"What we're learning is how to deal with it. How to protect ourselves, like I say, how to quarantine the buildings, how to disinfect the buildings, how to take care of the birds, depopulate the areas, and reestablish production for the farmers," said John Fortman, veterinarian.

The training consists of different scenarios, and every group explains what to do in each situation. Some groups teach how to cleanse a person step-by-step, while other groups put on the gear to demonstrate proper attire. Although this equipment may look like it's out of a horror film, the emergency trainers say this is not a threat in north America right now.

"It is not a pandemic currently, it is not even in North America. And so the public needs to understand that when we talk about Avian Influenza, or bird flu, it's not the same as pandemic flu, it is not the same as seasonal flu," said Ron Snyder, Ag Terror director.

Fortman isn't worried, and he even sees reason to be optimistic.

"Having a broad spectrum of departments here is going to make this a whole lot easier to deal with when ... If it happens, which I hope it don't."

Columbia is the first place in the nation to receive the training. A US homeland security grant paid for the training.

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