

Metropolitan Transit Authority

Harris County



Texas Department of Transportation

City of Houston

Greater Houston Transportation and Emergency Management Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**HOUSTON TRANSTAR AND WASHINGTON, D.C. BASED OPERATION RESPOND
INSTITUTE ESTABLISH HIGH TECH PARTNERSHIP TO INSURE THE SAFETY OF
ALL DRIVERS ON HOUSTON AREA FREEWAYS**

“The O.R.E.I.S system will allow emergency response personnel to quickly access information concerning hazardous materials being carried by trucks on Houston’s freeway system”

(Houston, Texas) ----- On Friday, September 7, 2001 starting at 10:00 a.m., Houston TranStar, the Transportation and Emergency Management center for the greater Houston region and Washington, D.C. based Operation Respond Institute, will hold a news conference to announce the use of the O.R.E.I.S system to improve the safety of all drivers on Houston area freeways.

Participants in the news conference include Mayor Lee P. Brown, Charles A. Horan - Director of the Office of Enforcement and Compliance, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, William K. Byrd - Sr. Hazardous Materials Specialist, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Houston Fire Department Asst. Chief for Special Operations Dannie Smith, W.W. Rowland - Founder, President & CEO of W.W. Rowland Trucking Company and Dale Everitt - Operation Respond Institute, Inc.

The (O.R.E.I.S) Operation Respond Emergency Information System available in Spanish and English works in conjunction with rail and truck carriers to access hazardous materials by container number, trailer number and carrier name. The O.R.E.I.S system is directly linked to Chemtrec (Chemical Transportation Emergency Center), a 24 hour call in center and to the databases of motor carriers such as Yellow Freight and W.W. Rowland to provide hazardous materials content verification.

Houston TranStar’s use of O.R.E.I.S system will afford Houston area emergency response personnel the opportunity to quickly access information concerning hazardous loads traveling on Houston’s freeway system. This ensures that in the event of an accident, responding emergency personnel will be able to quickly identify the materials at hand, the safety precautions they must employ and the correct methods to contain the situation.

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In the year 2002 the Bush Administration will fully comply with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) granting full access to U.S. roads by trucks from Mexico and Canada. This compliance will lead to a substantial increase in the number of trucks potentially carrying hazardous materials traveling from Canada and Mexico into Texas and onto Houston's freeway system.

The Operation Respond Institute has worked with the United States Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to distribute O.R.E.I.S. along I-10 and I-35 from Houston to Laredo in Texas to improve incident response capabilities for first responders.

According to Jack Whaley, Director of Houston TranStar, "Houston TranStar has always been a leader in ensuring the safety and well being of drivers in the greater Houston region. In fact, Houston TranStar was the first transportation center in the country to use the Operation Respond program to inform first responders of what they can expect during a rail accident. The expansion of the system to include the motor carrier information to the existing rail freight carriers will be a great benefit to those having to respond to incidents involving hazardous materials."

The Houston Fire Department Hazardous Materials Response Team District Chief Danny Snell whose jurisdiction stretches from the City of Houston to the surrounding airports and works with the Port of Houston, stated "HFD's Hazardous Materials Response Team handles about 250 to 300 diesel spills on the highway every year. In fact, in 1998 alone there were only 27 days that the team wasn't called into service and 133 days when the team had four or more hazardous materials calls. Each year we respond to an average of 800 hazardous materials calls, working an average of 90 minutes at each incident".

For more information on the Houston TranStar's use of the O.R.E.I.S. system, please contact Artee T. Jones, Executive Public Information Officer for Houston TranStar at 713-881-3244 or Dale Everitt of the Operation Respond Institute at 713-977-3747.

Houston TranStar is a partnership between the City of Houston, Harris County, the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the State of Texas. Together these government agencies combine the expertise and resources of each agency to provide a greater level of service to the people of the region. For more information on Houston TranStar visit the web at www.houstontranstar.org.

Operation Respond Institute is a Washington, D.C. based not for profit organization dedicated to improving the safety and effectiveness of emergency responders through real-time computer based information systems, training programs and preplanning resources. For more information on the Operation Respond Institute visit www.oreis.org.