

Special training for local first responders

(The Cornwall Standard-Freehold)

DATE: 2013.09.21

CORNWALL -- Working as a first responder can be a difficult job.

With more than 1,600 calls to Cornwall's police department for assistance, as well as more than 300 of those calls involving people with some form of mental health issue annually, the job can be all the more challenging.

Which is why Cornwall's police chief is a big believer in officers on his force taking part in a special training program to help first-responders deal with people who may suffer some form of mental illness.

Chief Dan Parkinson said of such training, "We can never have enough refreshers."

Such a training program was offered in Cornwall this week to area first responders in the city and SDG through what is called the LEAD program (Local Police Services, Emergency Department, Ambulance Services, Diversion). Such training has become mandatory.

The LEAD training is modeled on a program that originated in Memphis, Tenn., which teaches how to respond to incidents involving people with mental illness, intellectual disabilities or both.

Parkinson says the program helps those on the front lines be better prepared when dealing with those with mental illness.

"It teaches how to de-escalate interactions with individuals with mental illness and who may be in a volatile state.

"It is important for us to continue this training," said Parkinson. "We are coming across calls that involve people with mental illness more and more."

"This training gives front line workers more awareness of who to call for assistance when dealing with individuals with mental illness and intellectual disabilities," said Michelle Gosselin, manager of the Mental Health Crisis Team at Cornwall's Community Hospital.

"It's definitely made a difference. Police know there is help and a partnership available." This week's training was the fifth annual LEAD training session offered locally.