

OPOTA uses AirSoft guns for training

By **Madison Messenger** - March 13, 2008



Messenger photo by Kristy Zurbrick

Jerry Zacharias, a training officer at the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy, displays an AirSoft training weapon (on left) and its real counterpart, which look virtually the same.

You never know how you're going to react to a stressful situation until you're in it.

That's why it's critical for Ohio's peace officers to get the proper training for potentially lethal confrontations. A donation of \$7,000 from Battelle to the Madison County-based Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy's (OPOTA) Tactical Training Unit will provide funds to purchase AirSoft guns for such training. Battelle, which has a major facility in West Jefferson, makes regular donations to support schools, hospitals and libraries in Madison County.

"We work closely with law enforcement training and the emergency response community," said Jack Ayers, sergeant in Security Operations at Battelle's West Jefferson facility.

AirSoft guns look and feel like real weapons, but instead of bullets, they shoot plastic balls powered by carbon dioxide, Green Gas, electricity, or springs. Think paintball, without the paint—though the projectiles leave quite a sting.

AirSoft is used worldwide by enforcement departments, military units, and security companies to train their employees in real-life environments. The ammunition is inexpensive, and minimal protective gear is required to safely participate.

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Why is that important? Lou Agosta, assistant executive director for OPOTA, says it's invaluable for him as a trainer to mimic what happens in real life.

"It lets us do force-on-force type training and nobody gets hurt," Agosta said. "We wear full face masks and they can exchange fire without the consequences of live ammunition. It really will enhance not only our existing programming but also allow us to develop additional courses."

Agosta has a name for such training—stress inoculation.

"You need to have it in a controlled environment to reinforce training," he said. "There's no substitute for force-on-force or scenario training. That's what keeps officers alive. If you put guys under stress and they make a mistake, we want them to make it here, work out the kinks here. It feels real. You still get the adrenaline dump."



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Jack Ayers (far right), the first shift sergeant for Battelle's West Jefferson facility, presents a check for \$7,000 to representatives of the Ohio Peace Officers Training Academy: (from left) Scott Weimer, business manager; Deborah Furka and Lou Agosta, assistant executive directors; and Tomi Dorris, executive director.

The gift from Battelle caught Agosta by surprise.

"We really appreciate it," he said.

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