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Emergency workers set to invade region

More than 300 police, fire, public health and emergency service personnel from across Ontario will descend on York Region this month to discuss dealing with potential hazards from a nuclear event.

The region's EMS unit is hosting Ontario's first chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear conference in Richmond Hill, according to Brad Meekin, manager of York Region EMS.

"Given recent world events — natural disasters and terrorist events — this is a good time for a conference

of this nature," Mr. Meekin said. "Everyone knows things like this can happen anywhere, at anytime."

Keynote speakers for the two-day, invitation-only event include retired Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, (famous for peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia) explosives expert John Bureaux and Dr. Chris Mazza of Ontario Air Ambulance.

"The best way to learn and plan for emergencies is to get all these people into one room and do it collectively," Mr. Meekin said.

— Roy Green

Police board cuts \$500,000

Increase capped at 9 per cent

BY ROY GREEN
Staff Writer

In a special meeting this week, the region's police services board met the challenge of trimming its 2005 budget by an extra \$500,000.

The board's final operating budget proposal of \$150.6-million represents a 9-per-cent increase over last year but is down from the 11.6-per-cent increase originally proposed. It's expected to get regional council approval next week, especially since the board met council's request to cap any increase at 9 per cent.

Police Chief Armand La Barge was able to comply with the request by delaying hiring plans for some civilian employees and by identifying additional revenue, according to board chairperson Dave Barrow.

"It's about half and half in revenues and in delaying some of the civilian support staff hiring," said Mr. Barrow, a Richmond Hill regional councillor.

"We're reducing what we were originally asking for, but we're not reducing our actual service."

The budget comes in the second year of an ambitious five-year staffing plan for York Regional Police and originally called for 67 officers and 35 civilians to be



DAVE BARROW: Police services board chairperson said some hiring will be delayed.

hired this year.

"It takes so long to get extra officers through the training process and on the road, we were able to delay hiring some of the civilian support staff," Mr. Barrow said.

Board vice-chairperson and Georgina Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler was pleased cuts could be made without affecting the chief's hiring plan.

"Chief La Barge will have the resources he needs to deal effectively with traffic enforcement and education, youth issues, and violent crime," Mr. Wheeler said.

The plan will see the addition of 45 officers to district operations, 27 on the front line and 18 to the criminal investigation bureau.

In Vaughan's district four, it means an additional 11 constables, two detectives, a detective sergeant and two civilian positions.

Fire officials continue to probe Thursday blaze

A \$100,000-house fire in Markham Thursday night remains under investigation.

The call to the blaze, on 14th Avenue west of Markham Road, came in at 10:25 p.m., Deputy Fire Chief Bill Snowball said.

By the time firefighters arrived on the scene, flames were coming through the roof, Deputy Chief Snowball said.

A search by firefighters determined no one was inside the building.

A Markham man said yesterday he was living in the house rent-free but was not home at the time of the fire.

No services were connected to the house, the man said.

No one was injured in the fire.

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