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Keeping people safe means vehicle rollover training

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — About 30 employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South took part in MRAP (mine-resistant, ambush-protected) vehicle safety and egress orientation training on Kandahar Airfield July 15.

To comply with a U.S. Forces-Afghanistan order (FRAGO 12-054) which requires all personnel who ride in MRAPs to receive safety and egress orientation training, the South District identified those employees who regularly travel in MRAPs as the first group of attendees.

“In late June, I asked the district’s supervisors to identify personnel who ride in MRAPs,” said Maj. Michael Dinkens, the district’s operations chief. “Civilian project engineers, project managers, quality assurance representatives, contracting officer representatives, public affairs specialists and management all participated.”

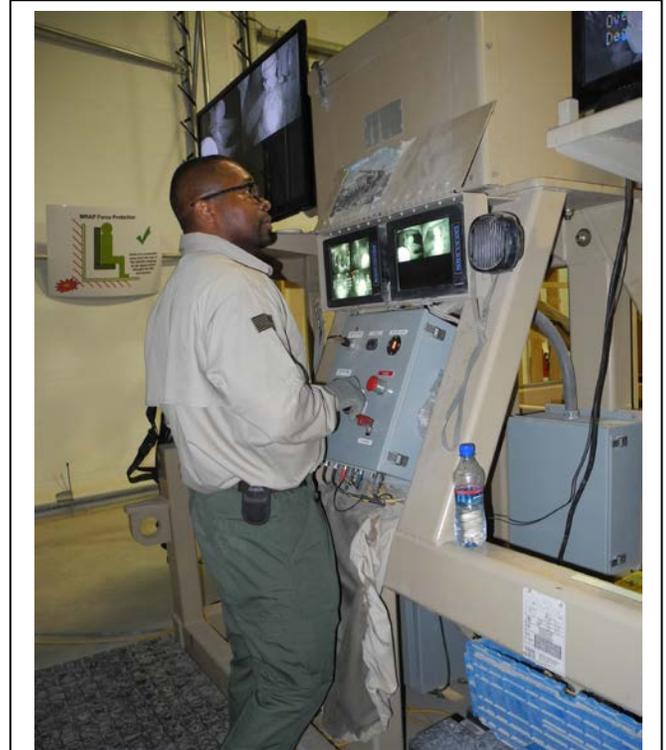
Dinkens said the egress training is important because district employees need to know what to do in the event of a turnover and to be ready when a quick reaction force comes to transport them to safety.

“The Soldiers who come to the rescue of overturned MRAPs are putting themselves in harm’s way and everything we can do to minimize danger and injury to the Soldiers and our teammates is a step in the right direction,” he said.

“Keeping people safe is the commander’s top priority,” said Dinkens. “Ensuring our civilians have the training needed to safely exit turned-over or incapacitated MRAPs helps them be better prepared when they go on missions.”

The training consisted of buckling into a MRAP rollover trainer, either a MaxPro or M-ATV styled vehicle, with the standard four-point harness, enduring a rollover and then exiting the MRAP at both 90 degree and 180 degree angles.

“I can’t say that it was fun, but I did gain a whole new perspective on just how difficult it is to get out of a vehicle with body armor on,” said Brenda Dunwoody, a paralegal deployed from USACE Far East District in Seoul, Korea.



Gary Pray, a Warfighter Training Program MRAP (mine-resistant, ambush-protected) vehicle rollover and egress trainer on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan monitors USACE employees during training July 15. USACE employees who travel in MRAPs are required to attend the training which include simulated vehicle rollover and exiting. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Photo by Karla Marshall)

“It was difficult to hold the gunner in place for all the rest of us because we were hanging by our seatbelts upside down.”

The gunner in the MaxPro must get into the MRAP and be held in place by the other vehicle’s occupants while the vehicle rolls. “I didn’t realize how hard it would be with body armor to keep the gunner from tumbling during the roll.”

Julio Arocho, the district’s deputy for programs and project management division, agreed. “We have a requirement to mitigate risk every time we go to project sites,” he said. “This training was a challenge and if I hadn’t done it, I would not have been able to really understand the difficulty or even how to get out of a tipped MRAP,” he said. “But it gives us more knowledge and real world experience. The more we know, the better prepared we are.”

Gary Pray, a Hinesville, Ga. native, and the primary training instructor said that the USACE civilians who participated in the training did quite well. “One of the most important things people learn is to ensure they have a solid load plan,” he said. “Water bottles, weapons, cameras, iPods and anything else you can imagine can and will go flying throughout the MRAPs when they roll over. So it is very important to secure and tie down anything that can become a projectile.”



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees buckle into the MaxPro MRAP simulator on Kandahar Airfield July 15 as part of their MRAP egress orientation training. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Photo by Karla Marshall)

Pray and his co-trainer, Patrick Franko are instructors in the Warfighter Training Program on Kandahar Airfield. They inject levity into the training but stress the seriousness of the potential dangers. Not only must passengers consider threats from outside the vehicle when they egress, but they must protect themselves from empty water bottles, Styrofoam blocks and copious amounts of dirt and smoke that fill the MAXPRO vehicle to simulate common scenarios.

“I got a few bangs and bumps from the debris in the MRAP,” said Dunwoody. “But now I know to keep my chin tucked, communicate with the other vehicle occupants, and most importantly keep my mouth closed as much as possible.”

This initial group of USACE employees comprise only a portion of the people to undergo training. “As many as 300 people can be trained per day at the Kandahar facility,” said Franko. “We see the most numbers when units move into the AOR but training is critical to the mission and occurs all year long.”