PRESIDENT BUSH PRAISES GEORGIA TECH
EMERGENCY RESPONSE RESEARCH AND TRAINING
AFTER VIEWING MOCK DISASTER

New technologies and training that may help emergency workers improve their response to disasters prompted a visit from President George W. Bush to the Georgia Institute of Technology on March 27.

Researchers at the Center for Emergency Response Technology, Instruction and Policy (CERTIP) are developing five technologies aimed at enhancing the response capabilities of emergency workers. CERTIP also provides training to first responders.

Atlanta area emergency workers and CERTIP employees responded to a mock chlorine gas release in an exercise watched by President Bush, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge, Congressman Saxby Chambliss of Moultrie, Ga., and Georgia Tech President Wayne Clough. Tom Bevan, director of CERTIP and Georgia Tech's Homeland Defense Initiative, coordinated the exercise, along with his staff.

The exercise gave first responders an opportunity to try out three of the CERTIP technologies developed at the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI). They were the Decision Aid software that runs on a personal digital assistant (PDA) and helps rescuers determine the agents to which victims have been exposed; the Medical Reachback System, two suitcases of medical and telecommunications equipment for wirelessly transmitting vital patient information via the Internet from the scene to the command post and/or emergency room physicians elsewhere; and the Situation-Awareness Geographic Information System for tracking the location of people and biological or chemical agents in the field.

Also on display for the visitors were a biosensor for detecting multiple chemical and biological agents and the RADAR Flashlight, also developed at GTRI. The biosensor is a shoebox-sized, integrated-optic sensor first developed for detecting contaminants in the food processing...
industry. The Flashlight -- originally developed for the U.S. Department of Justice to help police officers find suspects hiding behind closed doors -- can detect a human's respiration and even slight movements through doors and walls up to 8 inches thick. It could help rescue workers find unconscious victims, for example.

"I want to thank all who work at the Center for Emergency Response Technology, Instruction and Policy," Bush told an audience of about 2,500 that gathered Wednesday in the O'Keefe gymnasium on the Georgia Tech campus. He spoke for about 20 minutes there after viewing the emergency response exercise in a nearby parking lot.

"I have just seen a demonstration that helps prepare the emergency workers, firefighters and the police on how to take care of a disaster or an attack -- how best to protect the citizens," Bush added. "This is an innovative training center. And I want to thank all those involved with the center for your hospitality and for the chance to see firsthand how Atlanta and the state of Georgia are preparing for any possible attack."

Georgia Tech has been a leader in training emergency responders since 1984, particularly in the area of handling hazardous materials. "CERTIP brings together this hands-on, intensive training program with technology development to further enable our responders to respond to a disaster event," says CERTIP director Bevan. "This exercise gave us the opportunity to demonstrate how we can put new technologies in the field to quickly assess a situation and begin recovery in the event of a disaster."

During his speech at Georgia Tech, Bush recognized the hundreds of emergency workers in the stands behind the podium, including those he had just watched in the exercise. "Part of our homeland security measure is to enhance the capacity of first responders to deal with any kind of emergency," Bush said. "And that's what we're watching today, the training of first responders. Those who have been called into action must be able to save as many lives as possible."

Bush cited his fiscal year 2003 budget that calls for $3.5 billion in aid to states and local governments to enhance the capacity of first responders to deal with any crisis that might arise. He also mentioned the $140 million in his budget for mutual aid agreements between rural counties "to pool their resources, their talents, their time to be able to respond to any kind of attack," Bush said.

"We've got a big focus on the big cities, like Atlanta and the surrounding counties," he added. "But we've also got to make sure that our rural areas all across America also have got a capacity to respond."

Bush's visit to Georgia Tech marked the first time a sitting president has come to the campus specifically to see research under way. Other sitting presidents who have visited Georgia Tech include Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

Present for the president's speech were Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes, Congressman Bob Barr and several state legislators.