TEEX, IRECA partner for 2019 conference and challenge

Offering something a little different every year has been the guiding principle behind planning the International Rescue and Emergency Care Association (IRECA) conference. However, the 71st Annual Conference & Challenges — held June 17-21 in College Station, Texas — represents a more ambitious leap for IRECA.

IRECA expects to draw in excess of 200 people, including families of the participating emergency responders.

Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service’s (TEEX’s) Brayton Fire Training Field and Disaster City®, in College Station, Texas, will serve as its primary location. The conference is expanding the number of teams competing in its rescue challenges from six to 12, said Gary Leafblad, past IRECA president and conference chairman. “Doubling the number of teams in one year represents a big gamble for us,” Leafblad explained.

According to Leafblad, moving the action to a professional emergency response training field offers the opportunity to expand not only the number of teams, but also the number of scenarios each competing team can face as well. “We could see as many as 12 different training props utilized for the competition,” he said. “For us, Brayton Disaster City is a jungle gym with lots and lots of props to use.”

“TEEX is very excited to be partnering with IRECA for this event,” said Paul Gunnels, rescue program director at TEEX. “It’s a natural fit of their competition experience and our world-class facilities and experience in training. It’s going to be a great week.”

IRECA expects to draw in excess of 200 people for the conference, including families of the participating emergency responders, said IRECA President Reggie Nalley. “These response teams come from plants and refineries,” he said. “They have all the skills necessary to accomplish the rescue scenarios we put in front of them.”

However, since evaluating the work is an important component of the challenge, the emergency response teams are not permitted to prepare equipment in advance of the competition. “We have a list of equipment that is provided to them,” Nalley said. “If we want them to use a three-to-one haul system to get somebody down or to pick them up, the team has to build it right there on the scene. We don’t allow them to use pre-made systems.”

The top three winning teams from the 2018 Boise, Idaho, conference — ExxonMobil in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Valero in Meraux, Louisiana; and Bexica, Louisiana; and the Phillips 66 Sweeny Complex in Sweeny, Texas — are all expected to defend their titles in the 2019 competition. IRECA hopes to draw new challengers from plants and refineries across the nation, Leafblad said. The organization also hopes to draw corporate sponsorships from industries involved with the rescue industry.

Whenever attendees are not on the training field, they will participate in accredited education seminars on emergency rescue topics. While IRECA provides a number of individuals to assist with the events, judges and instructional personnel will be from attending teams as well as from TEEX in order to utilize its wide range of academic and instructional resources.

Another important change is the decision to shorten the conference schedule by one day, Leafblad said. The awards banquet that concludes the conference will be held Friday night rather than Saturday as in the past. Beyond the plans for College Station, IRECA is actively researching the possibility of conducting a future conference overseas. “We are in talks with some folks from Belgium about holding it there,” said Leafblad.

For more information regarding registration, visit www.TEEX.org/IRECA or call (979) 458-6805.