

## BC3 uses simulation system in training

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BUTLER TWP — Gunshots were fired recently inside Butler Intermediate High School's auditorium.

However, instead of the kind of lethal bullets that have resulted in school tragedies in recent years, these shots were harmless virtual bullets that are part of a refresher course for the Butler School District's armed police officers.

Butler County Community College earlier this month provided about 20 school police and a few other observers with a sneak-peek of the simulation weapons training system the college bought about a year ago with a \$120,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The use of the portable training system is part of the college's effort to expand its role in public safety by working with law enforcement entities. Already, the college has been using the system to train personnel for the Butler County Prison and the Penn Township Police Department. It also has received input from a number of other departments.

The training system by Meggitt Training Systems of Suwanee, Ga., is comprised of real firearms — two semi-automatic pistols, a shotgun, an assault rifle and a Taser — that have been modified to communicate with computers and a large digital projection screen using lasers and Bluetooth wireless technology.

Driven by software, the equipment works together to create a virtual interactive shooting experience that can range from firing at still targets placed at various distances on a realistic backdrop to video scenarios aimed at simulating real-life emergencies.

During the showcase, Tom Buttyan, an emergency medical services and continuing education specialist with BC3, ran officers through a series of drills two at a time.

The officers used BC3's two Glock 17 handguns retrofitted to work with the system. That brand and model is a common choice in the law enforcement field and similar to the 25 pistols the



Tom Buttyan, training coordinator, on Thursday shows the different guns modified for use in the weapons simulation system employed by Butler County Community College to train law enforcement officers.

Butler School District bought for its police force earlier this year in response to the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

The pistols also are converted to use magazines that hold compressed air instead of bullets. That enables the pull of the trigger to cycle the slide of the gun and simulate the recoil created by firing.

Speakers connected to the system also offer feedback in the form of gunshot sounds.

The first few drills featured still and moving targets for practice, but the last two drills were custom-recorded video sequences applicable to campus police.

The first video scenario depicted a student threatening three other students with a knife, while the second involved an adult holding a hostage at gunpoint in a classroom.

The actions the officers took during the scenarios influenced the outcome, and at the end of each drill, the officers were scored on accuracy. Also, each sequence can be recorded so officers can reflect on their decision making after the scenario.

“This is a very good training tool,” Paul Epps, coordinator of Butler’s school police, said.

Epps, a retired state police trooper who is one of about 25 officers serving the district, said the Meggitt system is similar to simulation systems used by law enforcement for firearms training. However, he said the ability to create custom scenarios helps it better suit the school force’s needs of being primed for emergency situations.

In addition to being portable and able to be used indoors, Buttyan said the system has other advantages over traditional firearms or situational training.

Instead of reloading magazines with real ammunition, which can take some time, the system’s magazines are refilled in seconds by an air tank.

At a cost of about \$900 per day to use BC3’s Meggitt system, Buttyan said there also is money-saving potential.

He explained that during the series of drills run by the school police, each officer fired 120 rounds. If they were using a standard type of law enforcement ammunition, such as .40-caliber Smith & Wesson, which costs about 32 cents per round, they would have each spent \$38.40 to complete the drills. That’s more than \$750 in ammunition costs alone, based on 20 participants, he said.

But for Buttyan, a father with children in the district who also works as a paramedic for Butler Ambulance Service, the biggest benefit of the system is offering accessible and flexible training that helps keep officers sharp.

“These guys are protecting our kids,” he said.