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PROACTIVE EU project held its first field exercise in conjunction with project eNOTICE and the Dortmund Fire Brigade

(Dortmund, Germany, 19 May 2022) The EU H2020 funded project PROACTIVE (“PReparedness against CBRNE threats through cOmmon Approaches between security praCTItioners and the Vulnerable civil society”), coordinated by the UIC Security Division, held its first field exercise in conjunction with the EU funded H2020 project eNOTICE.

The event took place on 7 May in Dortmund, Germany and was hosted by the Fire Department in Dortmund (FDDO) at their Civil Training Centre. PROACTIVE consortium partners worked jointly with FDDO (partner in the eNOTICE consortium) in the planning and execution of the exercise. This exercise was based on a scenario of a chemical substance being released near a train station from a freight train, leading to a specialized operational response. The chemical leak was simulated using disco fog in order to increase realism. The exercise was run in German and focused on the decontamination phase of emergency response. FDDO involved 130 firefighters who trained their decontamination skills.

A unique feature of this exercise is that project PROACTIVE recruited and involved members of the public as role play volunteers, as opposed to the frequent practice in training exercises when experts or actors play the role of the victims. In this joint exercise, the volunteers who played the role of the victims were civilians with little to no prior knowledge of CBRNe incidents. Out of these, some volunteers represented vulnerable groups, such as persons with vision or hearing impairments, persons with reduced mobility, or persons who do not speak the local language.

The volunteers underwent disrobing, showering and re-robing and the fire brigade had to manage the additional technical and communication challenges linked to the decontamination process of persons with vulnerabilities. Overcoming these gaps is in line with PROACTIVE’s main goal, which is to increase practitioner effectiveness in managing large, diverse groups of people in a CBRNe environment.

The exercise presented an opportunity for first responders to learn first-hand the needs and expectations of civil society. The exercise also allowed PROACTIVE to observe key challenges for future scenarios that will be addressed further in our project. Lessons learned were collected through debriefing workshops just after the exercise.

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