

The District of Connecticut's Indoor Post-Blast School

FBI New Haven's Indoor Post-Blast School – an intensive, week long course taught by expert bomb technicians and federal prosecutors – has taken place in Connecticut twice a year for over a decade and has hosted, each time, approximately 60 federal, state and local law enforcement officials, bomb technicians, and other first responders who might respond to and investigate a bombing or other post-blast event. Until recently, Connecticut's post-blast school was the only indoor post-blast school in the country.

The first half of the week involves a classroom component that includes intensive instruction on explosive materials; improvised explosive devices; letter and package bombs; large vehicle bombs; suicide bombings; evidence collection; bombing investigations; WMDs, Chlorine, TATP and HMTD devices; and investigative techniques / post-blast analysis. As part of the classroom training, two Assistant United States Attorneys also review: (1) case studies highlighting the criminal charges that might be available in post-blast or bomb threat cases; (2) legal issues that may arise in post-blast investigations; and (3) investigative techniques available by working with a prosecutor's office to further a post-blast investigation.

The second half of the course involves a hands-on, practical component, which takes place, with the permission of state and local authorities, on the grounds of an abandoned state hospital in Norwich, Connecticut.

The practical component first includes an outdoor "range demonstration" – a detailed briefing demonstrating various explosive materials. During the range demonstration, students witness actual detonations of explosive materials in a field at the former Norwich State Hospital, a couple representative photos of which are below. Post-demonstration, the students venture out onto the range to observe and analyze how different explosive materials work and to process the post-blast scenes.



In addition, at each course, four different explosive devices are actually detonated in different locations inside abandoned buildings on the Norwich State Hospital grounds. Each detonation relates to a hypothetical factual scenario previously created by the instructors, who also worked on developing, creating and detonating the device used in each scene. The detonations are video-taped. The students (who are divided into four teams) arrive at their particular scene and are gradually given details about what is believed to have happened, in an effort to make the training as close to what they would encounter if they were to respond to a real-world, post-blast scene. The student law enforcement officers must process the scene, collect evidence and try to determine the source of the blast, the type of explosive materials used, and the design of the device. The AUSAs consult with the teams as they encounter hypothetical legal issues and as they make requests for hypothetical subpoenas, court orders, search warrants and arrest warrants.

At the end of the week-long course, each team presents their findings to the rest of the class and the instructors. The instructors then offer critiques, confirm or correct each team's findings, and show them a duplicate, inert version of the detonated devices. The students also watch a video of each indoor detonation.

Over the years, the class has hosted, as students, veteran law enforcement officials, bomb technicians, and other first responders not only from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and bomb squads nationwide, but also from abroad. Many of them have described the experience as the best training in which they have ever participated.