

A&M students design high-tech ambulances

By Robert Stackhouse
THE BATTALION

Thirteen Texas A&M architecture students showed off high-tech designs for next-generation ambulances in the Langford Architecture Center Friday, displaying full-size replicas of the units that illustrated their theoretical response capabilities to biological or chemical weapons attacks, as well as improvements in day-to-day operation.

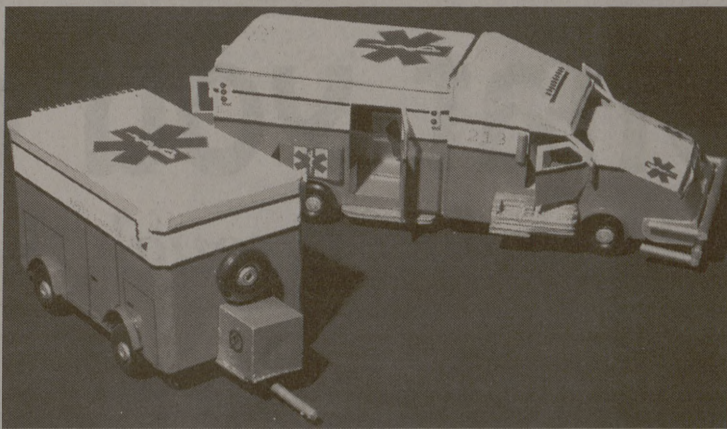
Professor George Mann, the Ronald L. Skaggs Endowed Professor of Health Facilities Design, challenged his students to design an improved ambulance which would have a greater range of capabilities than present ambulances.

The idea for this project originated from an uncomfortable ride in an ambulance that Mann experienced, said Chris Terry, a junior environmental design major and one of Mann's design studio students.

"He had a rough ride in an ambulance once, and he wanted to see how people who have no preconceived notion of how an ambulance should be would redesign one."

Dr. Jim Wall, a researcher with the Texas Engineering Experiment Station, worked with Mann to bring this project to life. TEES is currently working on a project in conjunction with the UT Health Sciences center to develop next-generation ambulances.

"(The students) did a great job; bottom line is, we're looking at their projects for what to add to ours," Wall said. "The students are unfettered by preconceived notions (about how to design an emergency vehicle), so they think outside the box.



Senior environmental design major **Thomas Neild** designed this 1:24 scale model of the Life Star Rapid Response Unit, which would sit on a Ford F-650 chassis and pull a bio-terror unit the size of a U-haul trailer.

They don't know what's customary, they just come up with good ideas."

The students consulted local paramedics, rode on ambulances and researched certain vehicle specifications to formulate their designs.

"I've known that if I expose the students to people who are passionate about something, the students will catch hold of it and take off – the passion is contagious," Mann said.

Some of the vehicles designed by the students were aimed at expediting the treatment of people who have been affected by biological and chemical agents. Current means of treatment for exposure to such agents call for the decontamination of the

affected person or persons at a specific decontamination site near the blast area.

In senior environmental design major Gabriel Guzman's design, a patient could be decontaminated from biological agents and given emergency medical attention en route to a hospital.

"It has a decontamination unit attached that would decontaminate a patient who was exposed to a biochemical explosion and would treat them (for exposure) as they are being treated," he said.

Other designs were aimed at the speed at which patients could be driven to the hospital and the number of patients who could be held aboard an emergency vehicle.

"If you look at a current ambulance, they can only work on one patient at a time," said Paul Greg, a junior environmental design major and one of Mann's students.

Senior environmental design major Shane Shupak's design takes patients to the air.

"I took a Chinook helicopter and basically redesigned the fuselage for life flight," he said. "It holds a total of 12 patients."

Shane's modified Ch-47 design would allow more patients to be evacuated from a disaster site than the current 2-4 of conventional med-

evac flights, and at a much greater speed than conventional ambulances, traveling at about 185 miles per hour.

Greg found a different way to accommodate more patients in a single vehicle than conventional ambulances.

"It has room for four stretchers in there," he said. "They (the casualties) can be double stacked to make room for eight, but you lose the ability to work on patients."

Greg's design incorporates gull-wing, or side entry, doors to make it easier for paramedics to load and unload passengers.

"If you are carrying that many patients, loading them in the back of the vehicle is difficult. Loading them in the side is easier," he said.

Adding advanced emergency medical technology to the ambulances was also a goal of some of the students. A function called tele-medicine enables EMTs to access patients' medical histories by swiping patient's driver's license through a card reader attached to the key board of the onboard EMS computer.

"(There is) the technology in some of the ambulances now where they can swipe the driver's license through and get all of the patient's medical history," Greg said. "They are working on the technology where they can insert a camera into the ambulance, and a doctor (at the hospital) can observe what the EMTs are doing."

After being acquainted with the conditions aboard a conventional ambulance, some of the students perceived the real need for ergonomic design in updated ambulances.

"It made me more aware of what was going on. It made me realize there was a need for something like this," Guzman said.

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