



Mock training drills held in Ponte Vedra

Residents of Ponte Vedra Beach shouldn't be concerned about loud noises on Wednesday

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PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. -

Six and a half tons of pure bulletproof armor and glass.

It's called the Rook, a unique machine used to protect law enforcement officers while they protect you.

This special piece of machinery is made by Ring Power, a worldwide company that started locally in St. Augustine. The tank-like vehicle gives protection to officers in a wide variety of emergency situations.

The vehicle helps officers approach a structure without having to be on foot, and they can gain entry to the second story of a house or building without a ladder, enabling them to search from the top down without having to go up an unknown staircase.

"Barricaded subjects, anytime that you might need to get into a building without taking a chance on somebody's life, you have a lot of protection in a Rook," said Kevin Kelshaw, of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office.

The Sawgrass Village shopping center in Ponte Vedra Beach is undergoing renovation. Local law enforcement agencies were given permission to destroy their building in training exercises Wednesday because it was already going to be demolished.

IMAGES: [SWAT vehicle takes down old Publix](#)

The training activities for SWAT teams and bomb squads were taking place at the closed Publix at Sawgrass Village off State Road A1A. The Sheriff's Office warned that residents would hear some loud noises and explosions between 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Wednesday.

Kelshaw said it's rare for law enforcement agencies to get this chance to hold mock emergency drills to truly test the limits of the equipment and their officers.

"It's very crucial," he said. "You want to know what type of damage you need to do to get into a building. You need to know what type of damage will be made when you breach a building."

The Rook is said to run smoothly and is easy to operate. There are three places on the Rook where officers can escape. They can get out through the front, through the top and through the back, and all three locations are made out of bulletproof glass.

"Any type of protection is important in this day in time with this machinery that's out there for the bad guys," Kelshaw said. "So it's a good thing that we are able to see what we can do, and it's a great protection tool for the Sheriff's Office."

Only four counties throughout Florida have a Rook. They are St. Johns, Duval, Alachua and Orange counties.

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