

# Emergency responders conduct mass-casualty training at Iowa City Municipal Airport

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(Photo: David Scrivner/Iowa City Press-Citizen)

At an inter-agency emergency response training Wednesday morning, local police, firefighters and medical responders practiced how they'd react to a plane crash in Iowa City.

It was the first such training officials have held at the Iowa City Municipal Airport, and it gave the dozens of emergency responders who participated the chance to learn how to navigate the airport and be prepared for a real-life mass-casualty scenario.

The simulation involved a van on fire in place of a plane and 16 "victims" — played by Kirkwood Community College emergency medical services students — for officials to triage on-scene and bring to local hospitals.

In the scenario, responders were told the plane carried 30 passengers and had to make an emergency crash landing after a cockpit fire.

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Emergency responders participate in a mass casualty training exercise at the Iowa City Municipal Airport on Wednesday, May 17, 2017. (Photo: David Scrivner/Iowa City Press-Citizen)

"I think it got people a familiarity with the layout of the property, how to gain access to the grounds, limitations for the fire department on water supply," said Johnson County Emergency Management Coordinator Dave Wilson. "There's not a hydrant on every corner like you'd see in a residential neighborhood."

Although officials encountered one phone glitch where the airport's landline routed the 911 call to the wrong location, things went as expected for the most part, Wilson said.

"We didn't try to throw a lot of unexpected things at them," Wilson said. "This was kind of like the 101-level tests, right? And then after we've done this an additional time we might introduce unexpected variables."

Wilson said the purpose of such an inter-agency training is to "shoot holes" in the existing plans to see what's working and what isn't. Sgt. Scott Gaarde, of the Iowa City Police Department, echoed that sentiment, explaining that it allows departments to work together to stress-test their methods in realistic scenarios.

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"The whole purpose of it is to test the measures we currently have in place and, obviously, see if there's areas that need improvement," Gaarde said. "And, obviously, to refresh what we already do."

Large emergency response training sessions are done annually, Wilson said, and locations in the past have included Kinnick Stadium, Carver-Hawkeye Arena and, most recently, Integrated DNA Technologies in Coralville.

Plans for the airport training had been in the works for about a year and were not put together in response to a plane crash in rural Oxford last month that killed Terry Koehn, 70, and Jim Spicer, 54. However, Wilson said such exercises can prepare emergency responders and law enforcement for a variety of crises and make them aware of small things they might not otherwise be thinking about.

"Obviously, you can't drive a fire apparatus across wet grass without the fear of it getting stuck," Wilson said. "So those types of limiting factors are important."

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