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Waterloo drill simulates air disaster

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Airport Director Keith Kaspari, left, hands out injury descriptions to volunteers playing injured aircraft passengers for a disaster drill in Waterloo on Wednesday.

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WATERLOO – A score of volunteers sat in the terminal at the Waterloo Regional Airport as Airport Director Keith Kaspar told them about the injuries they were about to endure Wednesday.

“It doesn’t look good, Bryan. Left leg penetrated, left foot crushed,” Kaspar told Bryan Foster of Cedar Falls.

“You’ll just be on crutches,” said Tah Wright of Waterloo, whose injuries were to include even a scrotum with multiple fractures.

Kaspar turned to another woman in the terminal.

“She gets the privilege of a sucking chest wound; she’s bleeding from her ears, nose and mouth. She’s in tough shape,” he said.

There was a collective gasp from the group and a few chuckles.

The volunteers took on the roles of a plane crash victims during a full-scale disaster drill that played out in parts of George Wyth Memorial State Park Wednesday afternoon.

Regular airport emergency exercises are required by the Federal Aviation Administration, and Kaspar said this year's drill focused on area agencies' ability to respond to water-related crashes since the Waterloo Regional Airport is located near a major river and several lakes.

"We got some good people in this county, and they know the real line of work," Kaspar said. "I'm going to make this as realistic as possible."

The scenario involved a landing aircraft that missed the runway and crashed in George Wyth park. Two MET buses simulated sections of an aircraft fuselage with wounded passengers inside. One section was on one side of Fisher Lake, another bus was in another area.

Wednesday's faux-wounded didn't receive moulage makeup. Kaspar decided against that because at a point during the drill he oversaw in Michigan, a volunteer had an allergic reaction to the fake wounds. He had to halt the mock disaster because of the real medical emergency.

Instead, the Waterloo volunteers were handed sheets of paper describing the injuries for paramedics to read when they arrived.

Floating and weighted props were placed in a lake to represent victims who had

to be recovered by the Cedar Valley Underwater Search and Recovery Unit.

There were other added twists. One of the volunteers, Kenneth H. Gaby of Waterloo, portrayed a United States senator from Iowa, and the narrative involved thousands of gallons of aviation fuel being spilled, necessitating involvement from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Agencies involved in the drill included Black Hawk County's Office of Emergency Management, local municipal agencies including police, fire and sheriff, area hospitals, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, state law enforcement and park officials, transportive-team personnel and others.

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