

Preston Hollow People

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Disaster Drill Conducted at Love Field

Responders test communication system during mock crash

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In a Nov. 8 disaster drill at Love Field, emergency crews got practice with a new communication system aimed at improving coordination among first responders.

Dallas police and firefighters and officials of the city's Office of Emergency Management and the federal Transportation Safety Administration tested the Dallas Interoperability Network during a simulated a plane crash on an airport runway.

The network, developed by Seattle-based Coco Communications, allows responders to communicate simultaneously using police, fire, and airport radios, cell phones, and tablet computers.

The system was used to coordinate security when Vice President Dick Cheney was in Dallas last week, officials said. Thursday's drill was the first time the system was used to its fullest capacity.

In the simulation, a group of 70 student volunteers from the PCI Health Training Center were made up with fake wounds to make the scenario more realistic for the emergency crews.

Responders set up a command center, triage unit, and recovery station during the drill.

The system is the first of its kind, and officials from Coco Communications hope the infrastructure at Love Field will serve as a model for other airports.



Staff photos: Allison Slomowitz
City and airport officials conducted a disaster drill at Love Field on Nov. 8 to review operational and response procedures in the event of a plane crash.



Dallas Fire-Rescue workers tend to victims in the drill. About 70 volunteers were made up to appear injured.

“We have been able to build an operating manual on how agencies should work together,” said John Stachowiak, chief financial officer for Coco Communications. “We can take what we learned here and roll it out to other airports throughout the United States.”

“Interoperability” became a buzzword among law enforcement officers after agencies began re-evaluating their protocols and abilities after 9/11. Emergency agencies have been looking for ways to improve communication.

Another component of the software provides encryption of various transmissions. This not only protects who can or can’t communicate in the conference call, but also prevents observers from monitoring radio traffic with a scanner.

“You never know the nature of the incident. There may be something the police are dealing with the general public really doesn’t need to be hearing,” said Terry Mitchell, assistant director of aviation for the city.

Airports have a three-year rotation for emergency drills.

In the first year, emergency planners review the airport’s protocols, and in the second year, perform a “tabletop exercise” where agencies meet and discuss strategies in the event of an emergency.

In the third year, a full disaster exercise is performed.

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