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Exercise Tests PHL Airport's Emergency Preparedness

Simulated aircraft accident puts emergency response plan in action

PHILADELPHIA – An American Airlines Airbus 321 jetliner with 187 souls on board experiences a mechanical problem upon takeoff from Philadelphia International Airport (PHL). The flight crew attempts to abort the takeoff when the plane makes a hard landing, causing it to break up and come to a stop on a taxiway. There are numerous casualties.

The Airport's highest level, Alert 3, is issued, triggering a full-scale emergency response from the Airport, fire-rescue and emergency medical first responders and hospitals across the region, and local, state and federal agencies.

The above scenario was played out in detail on Saturday, October 25, during PHL's Emergency Preparedness Exercise (EPEX), the official full-scale emergency exercise that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires all certified airports to conduct at least once every three years. While the 2014 EPEX drill was carefully staged, including the use of medical transport helicopters to take "victims" to area trauma centers, the virtual exercise gave the Airport an opportunity to test and evaluate its response to a real-life incident.

"Responding to a major incident like the one simulated in our EPEX drill requires coordination among numerous responders and agencies. It's a massive operation," said Airport CEO Mark Gale. "At least once every three years, we carefully plan and execute this exercise hoping we will never have to put it to use in a real-life situation. But if we do, EPEX is an effective tool to make sure that we are prepared and that our plan works."

Official observers from the City, state and federal agencies along with invited guests had the opportunity to view the drill. A group of official evaluators consisting of aviation professionals walked through the incident site to assess the procedures of responding emergency units.

The drill itself and the corresponding assessments from aviation professionals enable the Airport to determine the effectiveness of its emergency response procedures and implement changes or enhancements if necessary.

Also participating in the emergency exercise were numerous hospitals including trauma centers throughout the region, EMS training institutes, and ambulance services as well as the American Red Cross and American Airlines.

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“I want to thank all of the participants, the emergency responders, observers, evaluators and volunteers who took part in this important exercise,” Gale said. “It takes a great deal of planning and attention to detail to successfully execute an exercise of this scale, and the professionalism of everyone involved demonstrated that we are prepared to handle any emergency.”

The Airport wishes to thank the following for their participation in the EPEX exercise:

PHL Emergency Response and Exercise Support Agencies:

Philadelphia Fire Department Engine 78
Philadelphia Police Airport Unit
Philadelphia International Airport Division of Aviation
Philadelphia Fire Department
Philadelphia Police Department
City of Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management
City of Philadelphia Regional EMS Office
Philadelphia Non-Municipal Ambulance Service
2nd Alarmers of Philadelphia
American Red Cross
American Airlines
Delaware County Emergency Management
Delaware County Intercommunity Health
Federal Aviation Administration
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Tinicum Township Emergency Management
Transportation Security Administration

Hospitals:

St. Mary Medical Center
Crozer-Chester Medical Center
Taylor Hospital
Abington Memorial Hospital
Albert Einstein Medical Center
Aria-Torresdale Hospital
Hahnemann University Hospital
Temple University Hospital
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

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Delaware County Fire/EMS Units:

Aston Beechwood Ambulance Service
Brookhaven Ambulance Service
Eddystone Fire Company
Haverford Township EMS
Marple Township Ambulance Corps
Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital EMS
Narberth Ambulance Medic 313
Norwood Fire Company Ambulance Service
Parkside Ambulance Service
Prospect Park Fire Company
Ridley Park Fire Company
Rocky Run (Lima) Ambulance Company
Springfield Ambulance Corporation
Tinicum Township Fire Company
Tinicum Township Fire Company Ambulance Service

EMS Training Institutes supplying mass casualty victims:

All State EMS Institute
Crozer-Chester Medical Center
JeffSTAT EMS Institute
Philadelphia Job Corps Life Science Institute
Temple University School of Nursing
Randolph Technical High School
Star Career Academy, EMS Division

Physician Triage and Surgical Response Team:

Hahnemann University Hospital
Southeastern Pennsylvania Medical Assistance Response Team

Air Ambulance Units:

Christiana Care LifeNet
JeffSTAT

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During the Airport's simulated emergency exercise, rescue workers transport a victim to receive medical attention.



Rescue workers evaluate the injured during the Airport's emergency drill.

Photos: Paul Loftland

Philadelphia International Airport is owned and operated by the City of Philadelphia. The Airport is a self-sustaining entity that operates without the use of local tax dollars. It is one of the largest economic engines in Pennsylvania, generating an estimated \$14.4 billion in spending to the regional economy and accounting for more than 141,000 jobs.