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Exercise Tests PHL Airport's Emergency Preparedness

Simulated aircraft accident puts emergency response plan in action

PHILADELPHIA – THE SCENARIO: An American Airlines Airbus 321 jetliner with 136 souls on board is preparing to land on Runway 9R during a fast-moving thunderstorm at Philadelphia International Airport (PHL) when the flight encounters severe wind shear. The crew begins to abort the landing and do a go-around, but a microburst forces the aircraft down onto the runway, breaking it apart and engulfing it in flames. There are numerous casualties.

Following Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards, 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, September 9, during PHL's Emergency Preparedness Exercise (EPEX), the official full-scale emergency exercise that FAA requires all certified airports to conduct at least once every three years. While the 2017 EPEX drill was carefully staged, including the use of medical transport helicopters, the exercise gave the Airport an opportunity to test and evaluate its response to a real-life incident.

"We meticulously plan these exercises all the while hoping we never need to implement them in a real-life situation," said Airport CEO Chellie Cameron. "Responding to a major incident is a massive operation that requires careful coordination among numerous responders and agencies. EPEX gives us the opportunity to practice a simulated incident to make sure 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 and first responder professionals walked through the incident site to assess the procedures of responding emergency units.

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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 physician triage and surgical response teams, ambulance services including air ambulance units as well as the American Red Cross and American Airlines.

“I want to thank all of the participants, the emergency responders, observers, evaluators and volunteers who took part in this important exercise,” Cameron 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:

City of Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management
Philadelphia Airport Fire Department Engine 78
Philadelphia Fire Department
Philadelphia Police Department Airport Unit
Philadelphia International Airport Division of Aviation
Philadelphia Police Department
Philadelphia Police Department Counter Terrorism Operations Unit
Philadelphia Non-Municipal Ambulance Service
2nd Alarmers of Philadelphia
City of Philadelphia Regional EMS Office
Tinicum Township Emergency Management
Tinicum Township Fire Company
Tinicum Township Police Department
Delaware County Citizen Corps
Delaware County Emergency Management
Media Fire Company Ambulance
Norwood Fire Company Ambulance
Prospect Park Fire Company
Ridley Park Fire Company
Springfield Ambulance Corp
Tinicum Township Fire Company Ambulance Service
Federal Aviation Administration
Transportation Security Administration

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Lehigh Valley International Airport
Trenton-Mercer Airport
American Red Cross
American Airlines
Atlantic Aviation

Physician Triage and Surgical Response Team:

Hospital & Health Association of Pennsylvania
Southeastern Pennsylvania Medical Assistance Response Team

Air Ambulance Units:

Life Lion – Hershey Medical Center
New Jersey State Police
Jeffstat – Jefferson Hospital

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 \$15.4 billion in spending annually and supporting more than 96,300 full-time jobs for the 11-county Philadelphia MSA.

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