

Mock tornado hits Goodland High School



Goodland emergency medical technician Leslie Farley (right in above photo) and a technician from Kanorad worked on junior Bryant Nemechek, a simulated impalement victim, during a tornado drill on Thursday. Sophomore Jessica Lu (above right) was trapped under debris and suffered a "fatal" head injury. A medical technician (below) prepared to move senior Craig Mason and his "broken leg" onto a stretcher for a trip to the hospital.

Photos by Greg Stover/The Goodland Star-News



Hospital checks its disaster plan

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News

It was pandemonium after a "tornado" hit Goodland High School.

Parents swarmed the hospital, rushing to call other members of their families to report the disaster, frantically calling the school to ask about their children still there, and flagging down hospital officials to ask about kids in the emergency room.

Thankfully, it was just a disaster drill. Otherwise, parents would have been dealing with a flock of injuries, some serious, including three students transferred to Denver, and three fatalities.

Goodland Regional Medical Center staff learned the hospital could handle a disaster, but there were some holes in security. Officials said the exercise helped them to see what needs to be fixed before the have to deal with an actual crisis.

"It's nice when we do this to find all the glitches," said Brenda McCants, director of patient relations.

One of the security problems was created by the familiarity of many people with their home-town hospital. Parents knew their way around the building, McCants said, and tried to go back to the emergency room.

One got back there and was told to go to the large board room. McCants said hospital employees now know to watch out for that if a real disaster comes up. In cases of disaster, she said, it's best if the parents aren't in the emergency for their sake and the sake of the patients.

The hospital's first priority is to provide the best care they can for the patients, she said, and with several patients in the emergency room, they all have to be considered. But the hospital also wants to keep parents informed. That is why, she said, the hospital had a connection between the board room and the emergency room to update parents on the children's condition.

The fact that the emergency was



Goodland lawyer Jeff Mason played the part of hysterical parent to the hilt Thursday during an emergency preparedness drill, frantically calling his wife Nona from the hospital to tell her their son Craig had suffered a broken leg during a "tornado" at Goodland High School.

Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

a test allowed for some events that would have been more than frowned upon in a real disaster. For example, lawyer Jeff Mason arrived at the high school to discover that his son Craig had a broken leg. When Craig was put in an ambulance, his father, playing the frantic parent to the hilt, demanded to ride with him. Someone handed him the keys to the ambulance.

Some of the students commented that they had been told what injuries they had at the high school, but their injuries were different when they got to the emergency room.

The drill was organized by Mary Messamore, head of Sherman County Emergency Management. Bruce Gleason, head of the county emergency medical service, said. Messamore held meetings with the school and sent notes home to parents with the students' report cards.

Messamore said she had been working with the school for over four years on various exercises for disaster preparedness and spent the last two to three months preparing this full-scale exercise.

It was a compilation of about five years of work, she said, adding that she had help.

"I can't say enough about LeAnn Taylor (municipal court judge) and Police Chief (Ray) Smee," Messamore said. "They worked with me getting it together."

The drill went well, said Dale Shields, hospital human resource director; the hospital got to use its disaster plan and see which parts were right and which had problems. "We'll make improvements," he said.

During the drill, there were actual emergencies, leaving just one ambulance in town. One ambulance was in Hays for a patient transfer, Gleason said, adding that during the exercise, he was called to take a patient in another ambulance to meet an air ambulance.

If there had been an actual disaster, he said, dispatchers would have called surrounding towns, including Colby, Burlington, Sharon Springs and St. Francis, to get as much help as possible.

With the shortage of ambulances, coach Connie Livengood drove "injured" students to the emergency room in one of the school's Suburbans. She asked Gleason if that was

the right thing to do. He said it was, that in an emergency, she was right to use the resources available.

Hospital officials had parents and reporters wait in the large board room for news about the "patients," including Mason, Sheryl Linden, Joni Guyer and Judy Nemechek.

Rusty Renner from KBSL-TV arrived with a camera and tripod to help the hospital to plan how to handle the media in the event of disaster.

Some played their roles better than others. Mason frantically called his wife Nona at West Elementary to tell her Craig was at the hospital. Of course, he also had to tell her that he didn't chase the ambulance — he drove it.

Earlier, Mason said he had called KLOE Radio and asked Andrew Melia what was going on. Melia said it was a mock disaster drill. Mason said he told Melia he knew that, but if it were real, people would be calling and asking, "What's going on?"

"So I'm calling and asking 'What's going on?'" Mason said.

McCants had a laptop computer set up in the board room that was tied in with the emergency room to get updates on the students.

When the drill was done, eight "injured" students came to the board room, where they and the parents had pizza and soda.

Shields came in to announce the number of transfers to Denver and a "fatality" among those brought to the hospital. Then there were jokes about the miraculous recoveries the students had made, including the dead girl, Jessica Lu.

Other students who played the injured were Ciara Abbey, Daniel Blake, Nichole Buskirk, Cody Engel, Sammy Lamb, Charles Lammers, Kelsey Leiker, Ana McClung, Jenna McGinley, Bryant Nemechek and Aubrea Winter. Other parents helping were Susan Doke, Roxanne Kling, Lila Leiker, Shelly Gausman, Denise Archer, Sharmis Emig, Stacey Thornburg, Scott Showalter, Judy McKee, Rod Blake and Jennie Shields.

Help also came from Karen Hooker, Richard Schwasinger, Brady Stint, Dennis Taylor, Dorrenda Harrel and Deb Wassemler.



Mock disaster trains emergency workers

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a point near the school to wait for the emergency siren before going to their assigned spots on campus.

Injuries faked by the students, with the help of a makeup team, ranged from dead to just a few bruises. One student was to be uninjured but hysterical. The variety was used to test the triage ability of the emergency personnel as they arrived, especially those who got there first.

The injured were spread around the school and grounds. Some were on the first floor on the west side, some near the football field, some on the second floor on the east side, one in the library and one near the south entrance leading to the old gymnasium. This was done, said Messamore, to provide a realistic test in finding the injured and lost.

Police Chief Ray Smee was one of the controller-evaluators of the exercise. For the purposes of the exercise, he was at a conference in Kansas City, leaving the shift supervisor, Officer Brad Parker, in charge as a test of the chain of command

and its ability to function when key people are missing.

Smee said one of the things he was hoping for was for his people to get a hold of him on his cell phone to keep him informed and ask his advice.

Smee was one of those responsible for declaring casualties dead, within pre-established guidelines, when treatment was ineffective or not fast enough. One was designated to die regardless.

To add more realism to the exercise, fathers were given roles as distraught parents looking for their children, including one who got into the medical center's emergency room "looking" for his child. Reporters were asked to get in the way of emergency personnel, at the school and the hospital, as part of exercise.

The Weather Service played a realistic role by announcing weather warnings and making some of the calls required by its standard operating procedures.

The exercise was timed to start just before students went back to class after the lunch break to make

accounting for students more difficult. The majority of students along with most of the teachers gathered at Max Jones Fieldhouse.

Although one victim was preordained to die two other students were declared dead, one because medical care did not get to him fast enough and the other because he was not fully evaluated. In that case, Messamore said, the emergency medical technicians working on the victim were called away for a real call and firemen had to complete the evaluation. The policemen was declared dead because he entered a toxic environment without proper equipment.

The exercise lasted about 2 1/2 hours, after which an debriefing was held in the high school auditorium. During the review weaknesses were identified and corrective action suggested to help make any future response to a disaster better.

One area several people mentioned was the need to quickly establish person-to-person communication between emergency workers and school officials as they