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## Mock boat crash provides lake rescue training

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**PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT** — Nine emergency response agencies participated in a mock boat crash training exercise on Lake Koshkonong Wednesday evening. Conducted from the shores of the lake along Blackhawk Island Road, the training helps departments be able to better coordinate efforts in case of a real incident. Two people “died” and 11 others were “injured,” according to the scenario for a mock multiple boat crash training exercise conducted Wednesday on Lake Koshkonong. Above, volunteer victim

Alyssa Banda, a lifeguard at the Fort Atkinson Family Aquatic Center, acts out her injuries even after being placed in the triage area on shore. Below, a boat crash victim is carefully removed from one of several rescue boats involved in the exercise. — Photos by Ryan Whisner.



conduct one training per year.

Wednesday's mock accident had been in the works for nearly three months. In the scenario - designed by Fort Atkinson Fire Department Capt. Mike Reel and Ryan Brothers Ambulance Service director Rob Lulling - two people died and 11 others were injured in a series of boating accidents on Lake Koshkonong.

Both Reel and Lulling agreed that the training went well.

"The biggest thing we run into when we run this large of an event with that many different departments you don't normally work side by side with is communication," Reel said.

Collectively, the Lake Koshkonong rescue personnel have been working together for 13 years and have made a lot of headway in coordinating rescue operations.

"It paid off tonight, but we've got to keep training once a year," Reel said.

Typically, they alternate each year between an open water rescue and an ice rescue scenario. This year's was to be an ice training, but weather conditions prevented it from being held.

Coincidentally, however, Wednesday's open water rescue did offer some problems that were natural events.

After record-setting flooding last year, Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River's water levels are low right now.

"We had trouble getting the boats into some areas," Reel said. "That's where we utilized airboats from Lake Mills Fire Department and the Rock County Sheriff's Department."

The Fort Atkinson Fire Department captain said the airboats were able to operate in the shallow water, helping in a scenario in which a boat ran aground on Vinne HaHa Road. It was able to go ashore and pick up "patients," shuttling them to the other boats in the deeper water for transport back to the triage area at

SUMNER - Nine emergency response agencies conducted a joint open water training exercise Wednesday evening on a choppy Lake Koshkonong.

The mock scenario: A three-boat crash with two persons "dead" and 11 "injured."

Encompassing portions of Jefferson, Rock and Dane counties, Lake Koshkonong extends into the coverage area of multiple emergency agencies. Milton Fire and Rescue, Edgerton Fire and Rescue, Lake Mills Fire Department, Fort Atkinson Fire and Rescue, the Rock River Safety Patrol, the Rock County Sheriff's Department and Jefferson County Sheriff's Office each participated in the training exercise.

On the medical side, Ryan Brothers Ambulance Service and Milton EMS were on the scene, along the shores of the lake off the tip of Blackhawk Island Road.

Also, the Maple Bluff Fire Department from the east side of Madison brought its boat, from which firefighters observed the operation.

Through a cooperative effort more than a decade ago, the participating agencies established a Water Rescue Committee to enhance coordination of water rescue operations. The group attempts to meet three times and

Blackhawk Island.

"Communication was probably our worst enemy," Lulling said. "Too many agencies talking on one channel makes it tough. No matter what scale of incident, when you get 10 people talking on the same channel, communication is usually going to be your most difficult task."

The Water Rescue Committee will conduct a review meeting to go over how to improve coordination and what response areas need to be improved.

State Department of Natural Resources Conservation Warden Ryan Ellifson also was involved in the scenario to keep nonparticipating boat traffic away from the scene.

In a real situation, the DNR would be notified of a boat accident and subsequently be responsible for any investigation aspects. Ellifson noted that due to his proximity, he likely would respond rapidly to such a scenario and be able to assist in any rescue efforts.

Wednesday's exercise primarily was held for the benefit of the rescue agencies being able to coordinate their efforts.

For the training, the scenario established by Reel and Lulling was a two-boat accident in the middle of Lake Koshkonong. As a result of the collision, eight people ended up in the water.

The 911 call, which also was part of the scenario, reported four to five people in the water.

Reel said one of the victims was instructed to explain that a third boat that was involved had gone for help.

For the purposes of the scenario, it was assumed the boaters were from outside of the area and got lost on the lake, ultimately going aground near Vinnie HaHa Road, killing one person and injuring three others.

"It took us a while to search and find out where they were," the captain said. "It was a very realistic, real-time event that involved nine different agencies."

Lulling said a total of 13 patients were listed as being injured, from minor injuries to wrist pain to people that were deceased from the boat accident. Injuries listed on cards carried by the victim included paralysis, loss of limbs from being cut by boat propellers and individuals who were intoxicated.

"You want to make it as real as possible," he said. "Boat accidents happen and when people are out on the water; sometimes there is alcohol involved. That's what we wanted is to have the most realistic scenario we could get."

Volunteer victims included Brian Kelley, Duane Maves, and Michael Soehner of the Milton Fire Department; Tim Poole and Calvin Wiersma of Edgerton Fire Department; Curtis Streuly, Tim Mauerman and Larry Klusmeyer of the Rock County Sheriff's Office; and Alyssa Banda, Mikaela Hitt, Laura Hrobsky, Emily Straub and Kristen Reel from the Fort Atkinson Family Aquatic Center.

Lulling said in such a scenario, Ryan Brothers Ambulance EMTs would be responsible for the medical aspect of the call. A medical officer would be designated to make the decisions on the medical side of things, deciding the number of ambulances or helicopters needed.

In addition, there would be a triage officer to label each of the patients in different classes based on severity of their injuries.

"Do they have to go the hospital right now, can they wait a little bit or are they walking wounded,?" Lulling said in describing the triage officer's task.

He described the remaining EMTs on the scene as "worker bees" responsible for treatment and care for the patients at the scene.

"They are in each area taking care of each individual patients," Lulling said.

The triage designation is based on a color system.

He said a triage tag is placed on each victim and the colors are torn off until the color at the bottom matches the victim's classification. Green is for minor injuries, yellow is delayed, red is immediate and black is deceased.

First priority at such a scene would be those labeled as immediate. Lulling said those are typically patients who require paid assessment and medical intervention for survival.

"These patients are at risk for early death, usually due to shock or a severe injury of some kind," he said.

Second priority from a medical standpoint are those with yellow tags. While they require treatment, Lulling said, the injuries are less severe. In addition, he noted that they might have a wide range of injuries and should be reassessed in a treatment area to determine transport needs.

Lulling said those labeled green would have injuries that require rudimentary first aid and frequent reassessment. He noted that people in this category still are patients, as some might be frightened or in pain.

The Ryan Brothers manager said it is important to reassure them as much as possible that they will get help and transport them as soon as the more severely injured patients have been taken from the scene.

"Any of these patients also could deteriorate if they had more serious injuries than originally suspected," Lulling said.

He said the person doing the initial triage does not fill out the tag.

"He or she only tears off the color-strip and attaches the tag to the patient," the EMS director said. "The actual filling-in-the-blanks of the tag happens either in the treatment area, or in the ambulance, by the second stage personnel."

For the purposes of Wednesday's scenario, eight ambulances were requested, along with three helicopters.

In a real situation, he said, the helicopters likely would be directed toward the eastern end of Blackhawk Island Road to land and pick-up patients.

None of the area flight crews participated in the exercise Wednesday. However, if helicopters were needed, options would include those from Med-Flight from UW-Madison Hospital and Clinics and Flight for Life out of Milwaukee or Rockford.