

Local

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Civil Air Patrol cadets investigate a "downed plane" during a disaster drill Saturday in Piscataway. MARY IUVONE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

TRAINING DAY

Emergency personnel stage drill in Piscataway.

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PISCATAWAY — By land and by air, local emergency personnel descended on the township Saturday, all with the hope that when an emergency is real, they'll be prepared.

The New Jersey Wing of the Civil Air Patrol and members of Community Emergency Response Teams from the township, Middlesex Borough and South Plainfield joined together for a disaster preparedness drill Saturday.

Also participating in the drill were the township and South Bound Brook offices of Emergency Management, the Possumtown Volunteer Fire Company, members of the township's rescue squads and local Girl Scouts, who played flooding victims.

"It's a training exercise," said 1st Lt. Mark S. Swanson, director of public affairs for the New Jersey Wing of the Civil Air Patrol. "It's not perfect. It's about showing them how to work in these situations."

The exercise started at 8 a.m. with most participants gathering at the Possumtown Fire House, 85 Stratton St., and an air-team meeting at the Central Jersey Airport in Hillsborough.

After a quick briefing and a quick breakfast provided by the Salvation Army, the volunteers spread out to three mock disaster locations: Dow Chemical, 1 River Road, the site of a mock plane crash; Riverside Park, River Road and Interstate 287, where local Girl Scouts were rescued from a "flooded" camp site; then back to the fire house, where team members practiced extricating a dummy from a faux building collapse.

Air crews flying in Civil Air Patrol Cessnas coordinated with ground teams to find the disaster areas and guide the ground teams.

Capt. Ulrich Gordon-Lewis, commander of the Civil Air Patrol squadron at Fort Monmouth, said Saturday's exercises represent the new face of the Civil Air Patrol.

Improved technology is largely responsible



Brandon Bjelka, center, a volunteer Civil Air Patrol cadet, holds a locator antenna as he and others investigate a simulated plane crash. MARY IUVONE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

for the change, Swanson said. He said all planes are equipped with electronic location transmitters that emit a sound detectable by Civil Air Patrol equipment.

The transmitters soon will be replaced with digital transmitters, which are able to send more information about downed crafts, including the owner's contact information and global positioning coordinates.

That means the Civil Air Patrol likely won't have to be deployed on false alarms, because officers can phone the plane's owner before sending out the team. The GPS system also means downed aircraft should be located more quickly.

But as Saturday was a training exercise, the events were more about training than about speed. And that was just fine with Paul Rivers of Piscataway, a Girl Scout's dad who was playing the "pilot and/or co-pilot" of the downed plane. According to the disaster scenario, Rivers was rendered unconscious, and his two passengers walked off into the woods seeking help.

As he waited for the search-and-rescue team to find him, Rivers, who works as a truck driver, laid comfortably on a row of hay bales.

"I'm working on about two hours of sleep," Rivers said.