



Partnership 'commendable' in mass casualty drill

[By Kate McCardell](#)

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The scene outside Gulf Franklin Center last Thursday could have been described as an organized mess. Ambulances and emergency personnel acted as busy satellites, working their way around a school bus from which injured and dying students emerged.

Fortunately, the students were only acting in a mass casualty drill, conducted by county emergency management and Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf.

"They all did very well. The focus of it was to make a combined effort, one that involved field units and operations at Sacred Heart Hospital. Then we evaluate the town's different venues there and report back to them with our findings," said Terry Schenk, Disasters, Strategies, and Ideas Group (DSI) Exercise Director.

Schenk said that the official findings are still being processed and should be done within two weeks. Those findings will then be shared with the entities that participated.

Gulf County Emergency Management, Gulf County Emergency Medical Services, the Gulf County Sheriff's Office, the Port St. Joe Police Department and other agencies participated in the exercise, treating and delivering injured students to the hospital.

"I was impressed with the operations on the scene. In a lot of communities where they have limited resources to handle large incidents like a mass casualty incident, it's often times challenging. But they went through it and triaged properly," Schenk said,

"This incident had 28 patients and they all got transported to the hospital within an hour. Yes, it helps

when you're only a block from the hospital and the ambulance turn-around is quick. But they prioritized well. They had four in very serious condition who they transported first. The next category they took were those with conditions serious enough for the emergency room. Then they treated a large number of walking wounded with minor injuries and did the standard practice of using a bus to transport them."

Schenk said the community partnership he observed was commendable.

"That's an important part of it. Anytime we have an incident one of the very best things we like to see is all of the community partnering and coming together; all of them working to handle the incident. If you get an actual emergency, it's invaluable to be able to pick up the phone and request assistance and know the person on the other end of the line and be able to have trust in them. (Gulf County Emergency Management Director) Marshall Nelson truly succeeded in bringing all these partners together. This will pay a big dividend if or when the real thing happens," Schenk said.

One suggestion Schenk said he plans to make in his findings is for the county to prepare for an even larger incident.

"They'll need to identify additional resources available from other counties and communities, as well as from the state," Schenk said.

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