

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2012 DISASTER MEDICAL RESPONSE EXERCISE

By June Iljana, EMSA Dispatch Newsletter (June 2012)

Two days after a massive earthquake devastated his Southern California community, an earthquake victim is found in the rubble. He's badly injured. The earthquake has collapsed the nearest hospital and roads to the next closest hospital remain impassable. The only other medical facility in the region is overrun by earthquake victims.



Photo by Brad Alexander/ Cal EMSA

That's exactly the kind of scenario the California Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) was preparing for last week when more than 200 people converged on Sacramento State University for the Golden Guardian 2012 Disaster Medical Response Training and Exercise.

The federally-funded exercise, which was part of the California Emergency Management Agency's annual Golden Guardian readiness program, is an integral part of EMSA's grant-supported preparedness activities. This year's objective was to validate the plan to respond to a 7.8 earthquake on the southern San Andreas Fault that runs through the most populated areas of Southern California. "Although we plan and practice disaster response on paper, there is no substitute for putting people and equipment in action in a plausible scenario to ensure readiness," said Dr. Howard Backer, EMSA Director.

Within 48-hours of the simulated earthquake, a 50-bed section of one of California's three 200-bed mobile field hospitals was delivered to the affected area and set up in a large parking lot. It was staffed by a 55-member California specialized medical assistance team consisting of hospital administrators and medical personnel from Scripps, Tenet Healthcare and Stanford Health Systems. In addition, the exercise featured a mission support team and a five-vehicle ambulance strike team from American Medical Response with a disaster medical support unit.

"The goal of the exercise was to evaluate integration of state disaster medical resources and practice how the different organizations and resources coordinate to provide medical response to save lives and minimize suffering," Dr. Backer said.

It takes 72 hours for the hospital to be fully operational, but within just two days the lights and water are on, basic equipment and supplies are available and the facility is staffed with doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists, x-ray technicians, pharmacists and administrators ready to begin treating patients.



Photo by Brad Alexander/ Cal EMSA

Nursing and EMS students from Sac State's College of Continuing Education served as the volunteer patients with simulated injuries. "Sacramento State is proud to contribute to efforts that save lives in California. Practical learning has long been a hallmark of our campus, and the readiness exercise highlights our students' tremendous impact on the communities we serve," said Sacramento State President Alexander Gonzalez.

Helicopters from the California National Guard, CALSTAR and Mercy Air Ambulance services transported some of the mock patients from Mather airport to the exercise site. Ambulances met the helicopters in the landing zone and transported the patients to the state-of-the art mobile field hospital where medical crews and support personnel were waiting. The patients were thoroughly briefed on the nature of their injuries to effectively play their part.

EMSA's Chief of Administration, Rick Trussell, volunteered for the action early on. "During previous exercises I have always participated as a response team member. Volunteering as a victim allowed me to experience firsthand the actual deployment of California's disaster

medical response assets and the level of care received during a disaster,” said Trussell.

The patient passes through the doors into a giant tube-shaped tent. Inside it's a series of temperature-controlled, brightly lit tunnels leading off a main corridor. Each room has a row of rolling gurney beds and equipment for a specific purpose. Intensive care, trauma, surgery; a single patient may spend time in many of these rooms. It's clear that organization and planning are key to an effective response, but those elements rely on training.

“With budget cuts throughout government in recent years, training opportunities have been scaled back,” explained Daniel R. Smiley, EMSA Chief Deputy Director. “The state and the federal government have made significant investments over the past decade in California’s preparedness. We’ve spent money for planning, personnel and equipment but to maintain the usefulness of those human and physical resources we must train with them.”

This was the third exercise involving the mobile field hospitals since they were purchased in 2006. They were first deployed for the Rough and Ready Exercise in August 2007 at Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos. The following year, they were used in the Golden Guardian Exercise at March Air Reserve Base in Riverside.



Photo by Justin Short/ Cal EMSA

Patty Skoglund is a registered nurse and Senior Director of Disaster Preparedness for Scripps Health. She has long been involved in EMSA’s disaster preparedness program and participated in developing the mobile field hospital program from the beginning.

“The first exercise was about getting to know the mobile field hospital and taking a look at

the kind of capability it had. In the second exercise, we deployed a full team and developed scenarios similar to the exercise this week and worked on policy development and planning and on bringing the Cal-MAT into the exercise,” she explained. “This time we focused on patient flow and coordinating efforts between the Mission Support Team, the Ambulance Strike Team and the Hospital Administrative Support Unit and integrated Stanford and Tenet into the hospital to test transition from one team to another. This is the first time there was significant integration of all of the teams to support the response,” Ms. Skoglund said.

Priscilla Rivera joined EMSA’s paramedic licensing unit a year ago and soon signed up for the mission support team training. During this exercise, she worked in the finance unit. “I was pleased that I got to experience the things I had learned in the class directly and through the eyes and experience of so many people who had done this before.”

“The exercise was extremely successful resulting in a lot of ideas for process improvement. It really validated to me that if I were to bring a 50-person team into the hospital and work with the teams as we did we would be very successful in treating patients during a real disaster,” Ms. Skoglund said. “I think this exercise validated the need for this kind of coordinated effort in managing casualties during a disaster.”

MaryAnn Codeglia, a registered nurse and Director of Emergency Preparedness at San Ramon Regional Medical Center, was on the Tenet Healthcare hospital administrative support unit team as deputy commander and operations chief. “We partnered with the Scripps team for the last mobile field hospital exercise and it was an honor to be asked to come back,” she said. “We had an even better experience this time because we also got to partner with Stanford. The collaboration of the three teams was outstanding and the leadership from Scripps was excellent.”

“If any hospitals were damaged even temporarily and required evacuation a mobile field hospital would provide great assistance in that,” said Scripps President and CEO Chris Van Gorder, who served as the hospital commander throughout the exercise. “Even if all hospitals are operational many of them are already operating at capacity now. The mobile field hospitals can provide surge capacity for urgent care, temporary emergency room, transfer center, triage center; they could provide all sorts of different kinds of resources because they’re so flexible.”

The exercise was managed by EMSA’s Disaster Medical Services Division, led by Division Chief Lisa Schoenthal. Lee Sapaden and Bill Campbell coordinated the participants and logistics with Sac State, while Ron Alves of Alves & Associates designed and coordinated the exercise scenarios and execution. The mobile field hospital is maintained and deployed by vendor, BLU-MED Response Systems.

“I want to thank the public and private partners who joined us this week to make the exercise a success,” said Ms. Schoenthal. “We experienced the culmination of over twenty strong partners working together to prepare California for the next major disaster.”

“Everyone recognized how important this exercise was and the need for us to continue to do this so we can get better each time,” Ms. Codeglia added, “because everyone knows it’s

going to happen for real, it's just a matter of time.”



Dr. Howard Backer, Director of the Emergency Medical Services Authority, welcomes participants to the Golden Guardian 2012 Disaster Medical Response Exercise. Photo by Brad Alexander/ Cal EMSA

This article was featured on the California Emergency Medical Services Authority web site. The article can be found at the following link:

<http://www.emsa.ca.gov/Newsletter/2012/06-June/June-12.asp#GG12>

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