

Review Under Way of WCU's Emergency Response During Drill

Photos by Mark Haskett and Ashley Evans and courtesy of Bob Scott.

Western Carolina University^[1] officials and area rescue workers and law enforcement teams practiced responding to a possible shooting with injuries in The Village as part of an emergency drill held Tuesday, March 3. The drill lasted about three-and-half hours and condensed emergency response activities that, in an actual event, would have spanned several days.

Graham-based company EnviroSafe Consulting, which designed the exercise, is gathering records and evaluations from the drill and will share the results with campus to help WCU improve its emergency response plans.

“All in all, I think you had a great exercise,” said Kevin Dull, EnviroSafe president and CEO, speaking at a media briefing held following the drill. Dull complimented the strength of WCU's relationships with other local law enforcement agencies and rescue teams.

The drill scenario included investigation of a suspicious substance as well as response to an active shooter, who in the scenario killed one person; wounded two others, including a law enforcement officer; and took hostages. Multiple campuswide e-mails were sent during the exercise, and the public relations and Web services office tested the emergency notification system, which communicates emergency information and instructions in phone calls, e-mails and text messages. Other activities included evacuations, witness interviews, gathering information and intelligence, planning a tactical response, apprehending the suspect and investigating the crime scene.



Assistant Chief Ernie Hudson (left), WCUPD field incident commander, talks with Captain Steve Lillard (right) of the Jackson County Sheriff's Office during the drill.

“The way this was run, it became a very real experience for the people involved in it,” said Chancellor John W. Bardo, also speaking at the media briefing. Bardo spent the drill in the Emergency Operations Center, housed in an office in the Center for Applied Technology building.

University Police Chief Tom Johnson also worked from the Emergency Operations Center. Johnson stressed that the drill was a learning opportunity for participants and said his unit will continue to train for such an emergency.

“You never get to a point where you feel like you’re ready,” he said. “There will always be a lot of ‘what-if’ scenarios.”

Here’s a general timeline from the drill:

- 12:34 p.m.** - Man with a gun/shooting at The Village reported via emergency call box.
- 12:35 p.m.** - Officers dispatched.
- 12:36 p.m.** - Officers arrive on-scene.
- 12:37 p.m.** - Emergency Operations Center activated.
- 12:37 p.m.** - Confirmed sighting of man with a gun/shooter.
- 12:38 p.m.** - Siren activated.
- 12:38 p.m.** - Officers report shots fired.
- 12:39 p.m.** - Officers make entry at Village 1500 house.
- 12:39 p.m.** - Officers report numerous victims down outside and inside Village 1500 house.
- 12:40 p.m.** - Law enforcement/fire/EMS mutual aid requested. WCU EMS dispatched.
- 12:41 p.m.** - Officers advised shooter barricaded inside Village 1500 house.
- 12:42 p.m.** - Incident command initiated, command post located at WCU Print Shop.
- 12:42 p.m.** - Emergency announcement and shelter-in-place instruction sent by telephone, text message and e-mail via CatTracker^[2].
- 12:43 p.m.** - Jackson County dispatchers contacted by phone to request mutual aid.
- 12:45 p.m.** - Jackson County sheriff’s deputies arrive on scene.
- 12:45 p.m.** - WCU EMS arrives on scene.
- 12:48 p.m.** - Suspect makes first call to WCU police department dispatchers.
- 12:50 p.m.** - Jackson County sheriff command arrives at command post.
- 12:51 p.m.** - Officers report shots fired.
- 12:52 p.m.** - Radio report of officer shot/down.
- 12:58 p.m.** - Suspect makes second call to WCU police department dispatcher; puts hostage on the line.
- 1:02 p.m.** - EMS unit reports they are pinned down by gunfire.
- 1:08 p.m.** - EOC requests siren activation with “shelter in place” announcement.
- 1:11 p.m.** - Siren activated and “shelter in place” announcement made.
- 1:11 p.m.** - Suspect identified.
- 1:16 p.m.** - Incident commander requests building floor plans.
- 1:20 p.m.** - Dispatcher sent to command post to assist with communications.
- 1:20 p.m.** - Jackson County Sheriff’s Office tactical team en route.
- 1:27 p.m.** - Dispatcher arrives at command post.
- 1:34 p.m.** - Back-up officers arrive on scene.
- 1:45 p.m.** - Students evacuated from area of The Village.
- 2:25 p.m.** - Suspect makes third call to WCU police dispatch, requests to speak with negotiator.
- 2:25 p.m.** - Command post requests supplies (lights, food, batteries, etc.) to support extended operation.
- 2:26 p.m.** - Command post notified of suspect request to speak with negotiator.
- 2:34 p.m.** - Command post requests arrangements be made to relieve initial responders.
- 2:51 p.m.** - Suspect makes fourth call to WCU police dispatcher, requests to speak with negotiator.
- 2:52 p.m.** - Command post notified of suspect request to speak with negotiator.

- 3:02 p.m.** - EOC request WCU night shift officers be called in to relieve initial responding officers.
- 3:10 p.m.** - Second dispatcher arrives at command post to assist with communications.
- 3:10 p.m.** - Suspect makes fifth call to WCU dispatcher and requests to speak with negotiator.
- 3:11 p.m.** - Command post notified of suspect request to speak with negotiator.
- 3:38 p.m.** - Command post provides list of released hostages and their contact information.
- 3:47 p.m.** - Administrative lieutenant arrives at command post.
- 3:49 p.m.** - Siren activated, “all clear” announcement made.
- 4:01 p.m.** - Drill exercise ended (as announced via automated phone call and e-mail).
- 4:27 p.m.** - Final media briefing.



The drill was funded by a \$40,000 federal homeland security grant to the Jackson County Emergency Management Office to help law enforcement agencies, emergency responders and university officials evaluate existing crisis response plans, policies and procedures. Participants included the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office, Sylva Police Department, Cullowhee Fire Department, WestCare Emergency Medical Service and Asheville Fire and Rescue.

Check out WCU’s emergency page online at <http://emergency.wcu.edu>^[3], and sign up to receive emergency notifications at <http://www.wcu-campus.info>^[4].

Chief of Police Tom Johnson (left) and Bill Manware (right), of Facilities Management, work in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Article printed from The Reporter: <http://thereporter.wcu.edu>

URL to article: <http://thereporter.wcu.edu/2009/03/review-of-wcu%e2%80%99s-emergency-response-in-drill-under-way/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Western Carolina University: <http://www.wcu.edu>

[2] CatTracker: <http://www.wcu-campus.info/go/maillinglist/1400/>

[3] <http://emergency.wcu.edu>: <http://emergency.wcu.edu/>

[4] <http://www.wcu-campus.info>: <http://www.wcu-campus.info/>