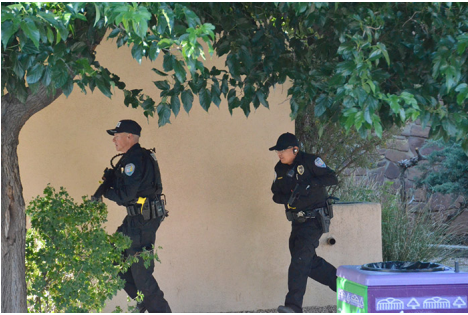


Active shooter exercise prepares first responders for mayhem

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 20 July 2018 04:10



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Octavia FELLIN Library serves as ground zero

Knock on wood ... there wasn't an active mass shooting in Gallup this past week, but instead members of police and fire departments, staff from Gallup Indian Medical Center, and city employees acted as if there was a live shooting playing out.

The city held the active shooter drill at the Octavia Fellin Public Library July 12. The city's website states: the objective of the exercise was to identify and evaluate planning, response, mitigation and recovery actions associated with an active shooter event in accordance with policies and procedures of the respective departments and agencies involved.

The agencies that participated include the Gallup Fire Department, Gallup Police Department, McKinley County Metro Dispatch Authority, and McKinley County Office of Emergency Management.

Fire Department Chief Eric Babcock said the exercise was about the processes involved, with a focus on the level of communication with the police department and the hospital.

"It's moving fast," Babcock said of the exercise. "[We] just let it roll."

Starting in the morning, the scenario began with a husband and wife getting into a heated argument and interference from security. The husband left the library while the staff called 911, fearing violence as a result of a domestic dispute and the possible threat of the husband returning with guns.

Catherine Babcock, playing the wife in the scenario, explained to the crowd at Gallup Fire Dept. Station #1 how the response began.

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After 911 was called, the husband returned and the staff heard shots being fired. Another call to 911 was placed, this time stating that shots were being fired in the library. The calls were placed 10 to 15 minutes apart. Inside, the staff were watching on security cameras what the shooter was doing.

Per Metro Dispatch, officers were on the scene in about three minutes.

“It all took place rather quickly,” said GPD Officer Douglas Hoffman. “Certain officers were dispatched to the perimeters, [and a] contact team to make entry.”

Hoffman reiterated how it is the duty of the officers to run towards the danger, and that they move as a unit to clear each room.

“We sprint to the sound of fire. Secure the location, make sure no one else is a threat,” Hoffman said.

The library staff had been drilled on what to do in the event of an active shooter, including a reunion spot at the Gallup Cultural Center. Training had taken place weekly for the past three months. It was also reiterated that an aggressive response to a shooter was not part of the plan, and that exiting the premises is the best plan to stay alive.

Information was relayed to Officer Hoffman throughout the event, including news about people being attended to, ensuring they are unarmed, and seeing who needs medical attention.

Prior to the responders entering the building, EMS is notified with what they call a code 55, which signals an ambulance. They bring in medical when the scene is clear.

Joshua Bond, of Gallup Fire Department, said their initial dispatch was the Gallup Police Department requesting assistance. Their team will also wait for clearance before moving in.

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“Anytime there’s a violent situation, we will be a block away, out of line of sight for safety reasons,” Bond said.

The team set up a unified command post for EMS operation and for the police department, as well as keeping ambulances and other emergency vehicles moving.

The scene was described as chaotic because staff was trying to assess everybody, determine which patients are in critical condition and who needs to be sent to the hospital.

Neil Pablo, fire lieutenant, said that accountability for all patients is key and that they make sure all patients are identified and treated as needed.

While the scene may have been frantic despite no actual danger, officials from each department were pleased with the results.

“Everybody worked together, everyone did as they were supposed to,” said Jesus Morales, fire deputy chief.

This particular exercise was approved with a 5-0-0 vote by the Gallup City Council at the regular meeting on June 26.

The exercise was the result of two years of planning, and was further spurred by recent mass shootings. Councilor Fran Palochak made the motion to approve, citing a growing necessity to be prepared for these type of situations.

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