



"Victims" are tended to at emergency drill.

Helicopter crash! well, not quite

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The call went out shortly after 10 a.m. today — 13 persons injured in a helicopter crash on the Seascapes cliff area.

Scores of emergency vehicles raced to the scene: firetrucks from Aptos, Soquel and Capitola; ambulances from A-1 and Santa Cruz ambulance services; and cars from the highway patrol and Santa Cruz County Sheriff's office.

Everybody thought it was for real, but it wasn't.

The disaster drill has been staged by the Aptos Fire Department and Dominican Hospital. And only the top brass knew it was a drill.

"We didn't let anybody, including our own people, know," said Aptos Fire Chief Richard Chinn.

Chinn said the "victims" were the drama department at Cabrillo College. This morning they were made up to look as if they were hurt and when the stage was set, Chinn let out the alarm.

None of the people from the agencies responding were told that the "crash" was a fake until they realized it for themselves.

Highway Patrolman Scott Mitchell arrived and was told by firemen to make sure no one drove over any of the hoses.

"It was 15 minutes before I knew it wasn't real," said Mitchell.

Highway Patrolman Ernie Peters said he raced to the scene at speeds of up to 120 mph.

Not only firemen and lawmen were fooled. The local press also responded in force. Most reporters had picked up the call on their radio scanner.

Two Register-Pajaronian reporters and one R-P photographer were the first on the scene. They were followed by reporters from KSBW TV, radio station KSCO and from the San Jose mercury.

"You gotta admit the press responded well," commented KSCO's Dick Little to Fire Chief Chinn.

Chinn said everybody responded well.

"I would say we had very good cooperation (with all the other agencies) and had this been a real disaster the 13 victims would be in very good shape."

Chinn said that it was important to keep everybody in the dark, lest a lot of emergency vehicles wouldn't have come. He said that's what happened when his department staged a similar drill two years ago.

The drill is a state requirement for all hospitals — which must stage a disaster at least once a year.

Chinn said that his department and hospital officials will sit down and "critique" how well the drill went.

One thing didn't go too well. Word was supposed to be relayed to all agencies responding to go on a "code 2" basis (that is, go quickly but with no lights, sirens or excessive speeding).

But the sheriff's office and highway patrol somehow never got the message. So they raced as fast as they knew how. There were no real mishaps getting to the unreal crash, however.

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