



EMTs played by EMT/ Para-medicine students, at right, Jorge Arizandieta, Jr. of Framingham and Ariel Horowitz of Holliston and, at left, Laine Costa of Stoughton assist nurse Melissa LaFrance of Millville in moving her patient Mary McDonald of Marlborough. Mass Bay Community College Division of Health Services held its Annual Disaster Drill Experience Friday where the scenario for the afternoon session was the flooding of the "Mass Bay Medical Center" and the evacuation of its "patients". The senior nursing students played both the patients and their nurses.

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Disaster strikes MassBay - but it is just a drill

FRAMINGHAM —

A tornado touched down at MassBay Community College's Flagg Drive campus around 9 a.m. yesterday morning. In the gym, overturned benches, trash and bodies were strewn across the floor, as cries of "help me" reverberated across the room.

Though the scene was obviously a staged exercise, students and faculty said it wasn't too far off from a scenario that actually happened in Springfield less than a year ago when a tornado tore through the city's downtown.

"Nobody expected a tornado to hit, but it did," said Kimberly Alavesta, an assistant professor of the EMS program.

That's why MassBay's Division of Health Sciences has held "Disaster Day" exercises for the past two years.

While the paramedic, nursing, radiological technology and surgical technology students who participate in it have already had plenty of real field experience in their past two years at MassBay, the pretend scenarios — which also included a flood yesterday — give them a rare chance to practice without anything at stake.

“It isn’t real, so you have time to assess the decisions you make, and change anything you think you need to change,” said Erin McDonald of Avon, a second-year radiological technology student.

“The mannequins don’t move, they don’t scream,” said second-year radiological technology student Michelle Zolock of Framingham. “They don’t say, ‘I want to die, just let me die.’”

There were also a few living volunteers playing victims yesterday whom students had to take on stretchers and gurneys from the disaster site in the gym to various medical checkpoints in the building. While there was the occasional giggle, the students went about the exercise as if it were a real emergency situation.

“Some of them really get into it, and it gets very real,” Altavesta said.

One paramedic student, for example, hopped on top of a gurney to apply CPR to a dummy. And on the surgical floor, everyone — including the press — had to wear a mask and hairnet before entering the operating room.

Some students said the frantic action was a step up from the real-life scenarios they typically see at the hospitals they work at.

“This really helps you to prepare,” said Mike Alfieri of Quincy, a second-year radiological technology student. “I work at the West Roxbury VA, and we haven’t had any disaster scenarios in real life.”

Others said the exercise provided valuable practice coordinating with multiple emergency units.

“It helps to see their perspective and how they work,” Zolock said.

The likelihood of another major tornado touching down in the area anytime soon isn’t great. But students said they’ve already learned in their part-time hospital work they need to be ready for anything.

“Floods, hurricanes, power outages — we’re always prepared for any scenario,” Zolock said.

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