



February 26, 2009

## Boiler explodes, victims treated during mock tragedy

By *Nathan Mueller*  
STAFF WRITER

The after-school boiler explosion, injuries and abduction that took place at Millennium Middle School last Monday was just a simulation.

But if such a situation actually occurred, first responders and school personnel in South Lyon and neighboring areas are now more prepared to deal with it. In a matter of 45 minutes, the school was evacuated, victims were being treated and the missing student was found.

In the end it was a job well done, and one everyone involved was glowing about.

"Honestly I thought it went great," said Mike Casey, director of operations for South Lyon Schools and exercise planner. "The staff responded just as they are supposed to and we had some unexpected things happen and everything worked out."

The first department on the mock scene was the South Lyon Fire Department. They called for mutual aid from the Lyon Township and Green Oak Township Fire Departments as well as the South Lyon Police Department and the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, and ran through everything as if it were the real deal.

Smoke from a fog machine filled the hallways and the alarms were sounding as the emergency personnel - using a new virtual mapping system that essentially gave them a virtual tour of the building, including location of access points and fire extinguishers - navigated their way to the victims and the cause of the problem.

"It's not our normal, day-to-day type of call, so it's important to train because if and when it does happen it's good to know our way around the schools," said Erin Welch, South Lyon Fire Inspector. "Also it was excellent for us to practice with the neighboring departments because we were ready to handle anything they threw at us because we had the resources necessary."

The scenario was run by Patriot Services, a company which provides comprehensive disaster and emergency preparedness services to schools, counties, businesses and more. It was funded by a grant that South Lyon, as well five other school districts, received under the U.S. Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grant program. The program focuses on improving and strengthening emergency management plans for schools, and the six schools in the West Oakland-Wayne Safe Schools Consortium divided the \$570,000 to perform these types of exercises as well researching other safety measures.

The schools also share the information they gather from these type of scenarios with each other.

Casey said the opportunity to do practice disasters are limited because of the cost, but he stressed their importance.

"My background is the military and in the military you always do drills," he said. "The more you can drill and practice the more prepared you are going to be. However, I also recognize that when something does happen it doesn't always happen like what you practice but you hope to be prepared."

This was the second mock tragedy Millennium Principal Maureen Altermatt participated in, and she said the common theme in both was the importance of communication between the school personnel and the first responders.

"It was a very good learning experience," she said. "Unless you go through it and practice it, you don't think about some of the different things that could occur. We have so many people using our facility that we want to make sure we put things in place to ensure their safety."

Everyone involved with the program said they hope they get a chance to do it again, and Casey said the consortium is in the process of asking for a continuation of the grant.

"We have been able to do some great things and the opportunity to share information among the districts has been very beneficial," he said.

[nmueller@gannett.com](mailto:nmueller@gannett.com) | (248) 437-2011, Ext. 255

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