

In Case of Emergency: Madison County Sheriff's Deputies and Godfrey Firefighters Participate in Active Shooter Drill

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GODFREY – Mass casualty events have become a part of everyday life in the modern United States, and emergency services must always train for the inevitable.

The Madison County Sheriff's Office and Godfrey Fire Protection District worked together Friday to simulate an active shooting situation as well as its immediate aftermath at Alton High School – as students were out on Spring Break. The drill included a collection of three scenarios, each involving an active shooter armed with a pump-action 12-gauge shotgun. The simulations were done through the Southern Illinois Law Enforcement Commission (SILAC), which conducts training for officers throughout the region.

Justin Rottman of SILAC, has served in both law enforcement and fire protection during his career. He led the drills Friday afternoon. He said SILAC conducts about eight to 10 of these drills annually in several counties the agency covers, including Madison.

“We don't have too many , but we had one up in Aurora a few weeks ago,” he said. “They happen more in businesses than in schools around here, but we have had quite a few threats. Kids being injured affects the public and first responders more mentally, but regardless of if they are kids or adults or in a business or school, once a situation like

this happens, it affects the emergency response teams mentally. The tactics may change based on a school versus a business, but the objective remains the same – get the bad guy doing it and treat the victims.”

Rottman calls the incidents “mass killer events,” because the method used could include more than just a firearm. It could also include a knife, a bomb or a car, or any combination of those things.

Lieutenant Joe Hallbrooks of the Madison County Sheriff's Office coordinates training efforts through that department. He said they try to conduct one such drill as this annually at least. He said the county pays SILAC per deputy for access to their training services. Other departments across the area do the same thing.





During the drills, in which actual Alton High students were participating, an active shooter armed with a shotgun firing blanks roamed the halls. Several students pretended to be wounded and bellowed down the corridors as officers cleared each room and spoke to the injured parties.

Once the suspected shooter was located and dispatched either violently or taken into custody, officers escorted paramedics from the Godfrey Fire Protection District who conducted triage on crisis actors and dummies alike.

“They didn't used to do this, but now more and more they have firefighters going into what are called 'warm zones,’” Godfrey Emergency Management Director Chris Sichra said following the first scenario.

In a warm zone, the entire scale of the situation is unknown to responding officers, so while one person may be dispatched, other shooters or makeshift bombs or traps could be in place, making the scene still dangerous. The Alton Fire Department has utilized ballistic helmets and bulletproof vests in similar active shooter drills. The Godfrey Fire Protection District has no such protection.

“The costs of those vests may be a couple thousand per person,” Sichra said. “We would need about four at each station, which is eight all together, that could cost \$5,000-\$10,000.”

Following the first scenario, Rottman spoke to the deputies and paramedics assembled. He advised them to develop their comprehensive mass killer event plans to add such things as staging areas for the media and solutions to further contingency issues faced in places like Aurora, where law enforcement would leave the staging area to go into the building.

Issues such as officers having children in the school were also addressed, as well as parents who may hear of the event and decide to take matters into their own hands with conceal-carry weapons.