

NEWS



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For Immediate Release:

**Operation “Unified Aid”: The City of Philadelphia and Local Hospitals
Evaluate Mass Casualty Response Capabilities during a Functional Exercise**

The Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the Philadelphia Fire Department’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Fire Communication Center (FCC), and more than 20 Philadelphia hospitals participated in a simulated mass casualty response during a functional exercise on Tuesday, December 1. The exercise scenario involved a mass transit collision of two underground trains, involving 12 train cars and 400 passengers. All of the City of Philadelphia’s activities for Operation “Unified Aid” were conducted at the Fire Administration Building, 240 Spring Garden Street.

Deputy Managing Director for Emergency Management MaryAnn Tierney said, “Operation ‘Unified Aid’ will provide us the opportunity to evaluate a number of activities, such as the Fire Department’s on-scene EMS mass casualty response protocols; new and existing communication systems used by OEM, the Fire Department and hospitals; streamlining the decision-making process used in determining which and how many patients to transport to various hospitals depending upon available hospital resources; and OEM’s role in receiving and fulfilling hospital requests for unmet critical needs.”

The Operation “Unified Aid” objectives are:

Communications: Utilize emergency communications between on-scene management, the FCC, responding EMS units and hospitals using various communications systems to coordinate the transportation of victims to those hospitals with the capacity to provide the necessary treatment.

Patient Triage, Treatment, and Transport: Demonstrate the ability to organize triage and treatment of mass casualty victims with a specific focus on transportation to area hospitals using national Incident Command System (ICS) principles of command and control and operational procedures that will expedite and prioritize treatment and transportation efforts.

Resource Tracking: Implement and maintain a resource tracking system where resources are tracked throughout the event to include surge activations: from needs identification, through resource request and assignment, to return to availability or demobilization.

“During the past year, the Fire Department has worked closely with the Office of Emergency Management to identify ways to improve our protocols for triaging and transporting patients to hospitals during a mass casualty incident,” said Fire Commissioner Lloyd Ayers. “Today’s exercise will allow us to evaluate these new protocols and refine them as needed. We always look for ways to improve and any lessons we learn from exercises, such as this one, will only enhance our response capabilities.”

In a large urban city such as Philadelphia, a wide range of circumstances such as transportation accidents, structure collapses, toxic chemical releases, explosions, or acts of violence or terrorism may result in a large number of casualties. Operation “Unified Aid” is designed to evaluate a unified response to a transportation accident that would require many agencies working together to provide a continuous chain of patient care. “This mass casualty exercise is an excellent way for the hospital community to evaluate approaches to coordinating and communicating with our city partners in managing a large-scale casualty event,” noted Tom Grace, vice president for health services and emergency preparedness of the Delaware Valley Healthcare Council of the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP).

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Note: The number of passengers for this exercise has changed from 900 to 400.