

# EMS drill stresses greater accountability

By Michaela Kennedy

Organization and accountability are crucial to a successful emergency response, volunteers learned last week at a routine exercise for the Jamestown Emergency Medical Services.

JEMS volunteers completed a search and rescue drill at Fort Wetherill. Captain and field trainer Christopher Reilly led the drill, incorporating the emergency staff's newly adopted Incident Command System. The purpose of the drills, held four times a year, is to train EMS personnel how to support the police and fire departments effectively, Reilly explained.

ICS is a standardized on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Organization. ICS was developed over 30 years ago as a solution to communication and organization problems that stymied the management of rapidly moving wildfires. Since then, ICS has become a required practice for all hazardous materials responses nationally and is used for emergency operations in most states.

JEMS Chief Rick Hodges assigned a safety officer and scribe to assist at the command post set up in the parking lot. He displayed a unified command system structure on the side of one of the three emergency engines at the scene. With about 20 volunteers gathered around the post, Hodges shared directions for the mock search of a missing person. "If a real call comes in, we

need to know who is assigned to what," Hodges told the group.

Scribe Linda Maclean began filling in the diagram with help from safety officer Nancy Bye, who is also a JEMS captain. They both asked the training officer about logistics. "This is the first time we've seen this system," Bye said as she sketched the search area on a white board.

The volunteers waited and listened patiently while the chief and the trainer coordinated the search plan. "It can be annoying to move slow with people milling around, waiting for the command post. But this is important," Reilly emphasized. "Without the command post, it's a free for all, and no one knows where anyone else is." He held up a board with staff identification tags hooked on it. "This is how we account for everyone in the field."

The command center established search teams, the area to be covered, and a list of supplies each team should carry. Hodges emphasized to the search groups that the missing man could be drunk in the bushes, a suicide or homicide victim, or miles away. "He could have hitchhiked home," Hodges said, "Hopefully that's the way a search ends, happy."

Search and rescue dogs from South County and Providence County joined the emergency drills, adding more perspective to the mock situation. North Kingstown firefighter Michael LeClair explained the precision of the animals' work, and the



Linda Maclean, left, Nancy Bye and Rick Hodges run a drill for the Jamestown Emergency Medical Services team. The drill focused on the newly adopted Incident Command System being used by JEMS.

Photo by Michaela Kennedy

canines wagged their tails furiously in anticipation of a hunt. "I'm just along for the walk," LeClair smiled. "They work hard for their reward." The working dog's prize could be anything from a tennis ball to a stuffed toy. "Sometimes, finding the person is reward enough."

Finding the victim was certainly reward enough for the human volunteers. With dusk setting in, volunteers were happy when they heard over the EMS

radio that the missing person was located.

The local EMS is always looking for good volunteers who want to help in the community, Hodges said. About 50 people are active in the emergency service, and about one-fifth of them are non-residents. "It sounds like a lot, but we get tight during weekdays," he admitted. Many of the volunteers have full-time work off the island and are not available when a call comes in.

JEMS' greatest need is for drivers, an easier place to start since medical training is not required. "You just need to be a good driver," Hodges said. "We teach you how to drive the emergency vehicles."

For information about free training to become a Jamestown emergency medical responder, send an e-mail to [jems@jamestownambulance.necoxmail](mailto:jems@jamestownambulance.necoxmail), or call 423-7276.

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