Small airport can make a big impact for Earthquake & Disaster Support Preparedness

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According to the USGS, natural hazards have the potential to impact a majority of Americans every year.

Nowhere is this more evident than the Bay Area with this year’s wild fires and proximity to major earthquakes fault lines. In San Mateo, Coastside residents have the added risk of damage caused by earthquakes as being cut off from the peninsula and traditional supply lines and services.

According to the USGS, natural hazards have the potential to impact a majority of Americans every year. To help the community in the event of a disaster, the Disaster Airlift Response Team (DART) pilots and community members joined San Mateo county managers and emergency groups in one of the largest earthquake and disaster exercise conducted on the coast. This training event was initiated by the local DART team and conducted at the Eddie Andreini Sr. Field at Half Moon Bay Airport on October 28th. During November and December, the DART team is following-up with many of the groups in an ongoing effort to improve processes and response plans in the event of an actual disaster, and for future exercises.

With over 80 people participating, the DART team and representatives from San Mateo County Emergency Management and Airports were joined by CalFire, AMR, HAM radio operator clubs, the Coastside Emergency Corps, the Medical Reserve Corps, and CERT trainers, Peninsula Humane Society, The Marine Mammal Reserve, and start-up UAS company, Elroy Air.

Over twenty exercises simulated the transport of staff, citizens, critical supplies (food, medical and emergency equipment), and animals between supplying airports and our coastal communities from Pacifica to Pescadero.

“This was really an important exercise,” said CERT trainer and Coastside Buzz founder, Michelle Dragony, after a recent Coastside Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) meeting. “In the event of an earthquake or other disaster that cuts off the coast, we may have very limited supplies for some medications.”

In this simulated major earthquake scenario, Highway 1, 92, and 84 were impassable, isolating the Coastside. With 12 aircraft participating, training exercises successfully tested the communities’ ability to communicate among diverse groups with differing needs and communication protocols. It further identified processes that need further refinement to stand-up in an actual emergency and changing weather conditions which could affect both flying and communication capabilities.

“With the recent fires in Napa it has brought disaster preparedness to the forefront of everyone’s minds and we were very excited to be able to include the community in this exercise.” said Gretchen Kelly, San Mateo County Airport Manager.

“The groups organizing and participating in this event are very experienced and it was a very fun and informative day.” Fortunately, the Coastside has a big advantage compared to other regional airports. We have the Coastside Emergency Action Plan group hosted by the Chamber of Commerce in which many civilian, county and other public agencies on the coast have been collaborating for years. The result is that the DART team was able to find out instantly which groups in the area can support in the event of a disaster – and how. This made it easy to gather the right groups to participate in such an exercise and see how they could work together. The CEAP group provided a big jumpstart, and is a big differentiator among other California communities.

We are lucky to have this much active collaboration between government groups or agencies, non-profits, and civilian groups. And now, with the formation of a DART team, the Half Moon Bay Airport will provide another resource the community can leverage.
Half Moon Bay Airport DART Training Event

SMC County Airports Manager, Gretchen Kelley, briefs the volunteers at the exercise kick-off.

Volunteers and Pilots organize among tents for Check-in, Shipping/Receiving, Communications and Flight Ops.

AMR, Cal Fire, and County Office of Emergency Services join the event.

AMR and community volunteer patients completed several urgent critical/ill critical medical scenarios.

Over 200 pounds of food were donated to Consolida Hope during the exercise.

Local HAM members brought their awesome communications command center, connecting the airport with the County EOC and beyond.

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