

Drill puts responders to test at airport



Jennifer Skoglund, Walla Walla Regional Airport manager, talks with television reporters following a mass casualty drill at the airport Tuesday afternoon.

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A full-scale drill to test local emergency responders largely shut down Walla Walla Regional Airport on Tuesday afternoon.

The drill started at 3 p.m. with the scenario being two shooters inside the terminal building firing on people preparing to board an Alaska Air flight. The drill finished about an hour later with one of the shooters dead, another in custody and 31 people injured.

During the event, traffic to the airport was shut off by barricades as dozens of police, fire and ambulance vehicles crowded the terminal building's parking lot. The exercise also involved a Life Flight helicopter landing to evacuate critically injured victims.

Airport Manager Jennifer Skoglund said the Federal Aviation Administration requires such full-scale drills for commercial service airports every three years. Tuesday's exercise involved federal, state and local agencies and planning for the drill had been taking place for the last six months.

Skoglund said that the drill appeared to go smoothly, but participants would be doing an after-action review later that day and then all the agencies involved will meet for further review in about a month. "So there's lots of follow-up on what we just did today, but outwardly it looked like it went as planned," she said.

Skoglund said officials do tabletop exercises to plan for major emergencies, but a full-blown drill such as Tuesday's event provides invaluable experience.

"You can sit and talk all you want about something that might happen, but to really be out there, boots on the ground, doing your job and walking through those scenarios, that's the best training we can do," she said.