

# Wisconsin Emergency Management: All-Hazards Incident Management Team participates in multi-agency exercise

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DOOR COUNTY, Wis. – While emergency managers have the capability to support many types of incidents, a complex response may require the combined efforts of many agencies. Training and exercise opportunities help to ensure those relationships are in place before they are needed most.

A functional exercise hosted by Door County this month sought to test those capabilities, while also working to identify areas where outside assistance may be needed in the future. The fictional scenario involved two boats colliding in the bay of Green Bay, leaving multiple passengers injured, missing or dead.

“We’re an easy target since we’re surrounded by water,” said Door County Emergency Management and Communications Director Dane Kane. “But this is a very real-world scenario for a lot of counties in Wisconsin.”

Under the scenario, participants from several Door County agencies – including emergency management, emergency medical services, volunteer organizations, law enforcement and fire departments – handled the initial response. As the needs of the incident expanded beyond their capabilities, regional, state, and federal partners were called in to assist. Among those joining the exercise into the second day were members of the East Central Incident Management Team and Wisconsin’s All-Hazards Incident Management Team (IMT), which is coordinated by Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM).

“Incident management teams are groups of experienced and well-trained staff from multiple agencies, who are equipped to come in and help local officials effectively manage a complex incident,” said WEM Administrator Greg Engle. “This exercise was an excellent opportunity to test those capabilities, while also give local responders the ability to see how those interactions can help improve the overall incident response.”

The exercise resulted in 17 members of the All-Hazards IMT team deployed to assist with tasks such as logistics and operational support. The team also brought with it interoperable communications equipment designed to help supplement what local responders were already using.

“Local emergency management staff can quickly become overwhelmed in a major incident, so the IMT is meant to augment their emergency operations needs with staff who are familiar with the incident support model,” said IMT Logistics Section Chief Bill Tyler, the exercise director. “Deploying qualified staff and state equipment to supplement what local responders are using can help take some of the load off their response and coordination needs.”

Tyler credited a strong exercise design team and the Lake Michigan sector of the U.S. Coast Guard’s response for this successful exercise in Door County.

While local responders undergo regular training, Kane said having an opportunity to work alongside experienced staff can be a major benefit to those who are hoping to refresh and strengthen their own skills.

“The IMT staff were phenomenal,” said Kane. “The contrast between days one and two were drastic. They were able to come in and help with things like planning for future missions and logistics. Working alongside them taught our staff a lot and will help make them more self-sufficient.”

Kane is hopeful the exercise will provide a model for other agencies in the state who want to test similar capabilities in the future and will eventually lead to a larger full-scale exercise in the future.

“My thanks to our state and federal partners for their support in this exercise. The players who came in did an excellent job and took it seriously,” Kane said. “I’m certain that we’re going to take some good lesson away from this.”