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## TAMC joins VA, community in mass casualty exercise

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By **Stephanie Rush, Pacific Regional Medical Command Public Affairs**Like 24 people like this. [Sign Up](#) to see what your friends like.

HONOLULU -- Tripler Army Medical Center activated its mass casualty emergency operations plan after they received word of an explosion in the Center for Aging's kitchen, Feb. 5.

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The mock incident was part of the Veterans Affairs Pacific Islands Health Care System's mass casualty exercise, which involved treating casualties on site and then evacuating them to Tripler's emergency room.

"Per the Joint Commission, the Center for Aging must conduct an evacuation exercise every 18 months," explained Steve Burton, emergency preparedness planning officer, VA PIHCS. "(In addition), VA PIHCS must, just like TAMC, conduct two exercises a year."

Conducting joint exercises is nothing new for TAMC and VA PIHCS.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Bethea, future operations and plans noncommissioned officer, Pacific Regional Medical Command, Tripler and VA PIHCS collaborate on numerous exercises during the year to include large joint operations such as RIMPAC and Makani Pahili, Hawaii's annual hurricane exercise.

"It is important to conduct collaborative exercises to see what each organization can bring to the incident and how you can help each other improve and to better communicate," Bethea said. "The TAMC participants learned how the Veterans Affairs conducts business."

Combining resources and assisting other agencies with vital services to include transportation, communication, manpower and health care is crucial to responding to an emergency or disaster effectively.

"TAMC provided a significant amount of support to the (Center of Aging)," Burton said. "The exercise validated our ability to design and evaluate a realistic disaster scenario that would in fact require a tremendous amount of joint response resources."

Tripler's emergency room and the VA PIHCS weren't the only players in the exercise.

Also participating were Navy Region Hawaii's Federal Fire Department, the City and County of Honolulu's Emergency Medical Services, local nursing students and Tripler's Provost Marshal's Office.

One of the two mandated exercises for Tripler and VA PIHCS must involve community partners and simulated casualties.

The 12 casualties the scenario called for were played by University of Hawaii-Manoa nursing students. Their injuries ranged in severity and those who were injured had to be treated on the ground and then evacuated with the assistance of first responders to include firefighters and emergency medical technicians.

Before the exercise kicked off, moulage artists used clay, putty and paint to apply wounds and simulate injuries that would be sustained in an explosion.

Even though the wounds are simulated, first responders and health care workers are able to better identify and treat injuries and respond to training scenarios appropriately when they look as realistic as possible.

"Although conducting exercises is a regulatory requirement, (conducting them hand in hand with our) community partners helps validate and improve our organizational and community emergency operations planning and response capabilities," Burton said. "Our staff gains valuable, realistic experience and confidence. It ensures the readiness of (everyone involved) to appropriately respond to any all-hazard emergency or disaster in order to save the lives of our staff, patients and visitors."

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