



March 7 members of nine different community agencies gathered at St. Patrick's parish hall to participate in a "tabletop" mock disaster drill. Approximately 40 individuals from the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department, Imperial EMS, Wauneta EMS, Chase County Emergency Management, Chase County Community Hospital, Chase County Schools, Ministerial Association, American Red Cross, and Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department took part in the exercise.

The tabletop exercise was based on the following scenario: On Wednesday, May 8th, school is in session and severe weather is in the area. At 11:30 a.m. a tornado warning is issued. At 11:45 a.m., a tornado touches down and takes a path through Imperial destroying part of the school and a number of homes. Several homes were on fire as well as an overturned vehicle with people trapped inside. The participants in this scenario developed planned responses based on the following timeline—30 minutes post disaster, one, two and four hours post disaster.

The overall goal of this exercise was to prepare Chase County first responders by raising awareness of interagency response actions. The specific objectives included communication between and within agencies, plan for delivering information to the public, and identifying strengths and gaps in interagency coordination.

The event was coordinated through the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department. A planning committee comprised of representatives from those agencies participating met over the course of several months to plan the exercise.

After completion of the drill, evaluations of the exercise were done. Overall, the majority of the organizations felt it was worthwhile exercise. Each organization also submitted recommendations related to improving response to a real disaster as well as how to improve future drills. As part of the evaluation, external evaluators from outside the community were present to observe the drill. Their evaluations have been submitted to the participating agencies for further study and implementation if deemed necessary.

Don Softley, Fire Chief for the Grant Volunteer Fire Department, served as one of the evaluators. "From the outside looking in, many of the organizations were functionally sound on their policies and procedures during a large scale event," stated Softley. "It was very positive to see several groups identify potential challenges that may occur in a real emergency. These exercises can only better prepare a community and I strongly encourage more government and private groups to become involved in the next mock disaster drill."