

Airport Emergency Plan

If an aircraft crashes on the runway almost anywhere in Minnesota you can probably dial 911 and get a response from local authorities that will put out the fire and transport the survivors to the nearest medical facility. But even in this simple example, how do you notify the FAA or the NTSB? Who issues the NOTAM to close the runway? If they instead close the airport will an air ambulance helicopter land? How do you mark the runway as closed both day and night? Can you move the wreckage to open the runway again? Where do you put the wreckage? Who pays for damage to the airport infrastructure?

Now suppose the crash isn't on the runway, but somewhere else on airport property and its winter and there isn't a road that leads there. How does the fire department get to the crash? Maybe its spring and the aircraft is in a swampy location.

Maybe the aircraft has a ballistic parachute system. Does the fire department know how to secure the explosive charge so it doesn't go off during the response? Maybe the engine is still running. Do the emergency responders know how to shut down the engine?

What happens when as the airport manager you get a call from the FAA looking for a missing aircraft? What procedures do you follow? What if one of your based aircraft is scheduled to arrive and it doesn't show up? Who do you call?

So you develop a plan, but the airport is normally unattended. How do you communicate your plan to whoever happens to be at the airport when action needs to be taken?

There is also up front work to be done to prepare for an emergency. You should know the N-Numbers and types of aircraft on the field. You should know which hangar they are in and if they have a ballistic parachute system. You need to have contact information, not only for the aircraft/hangar owner, but also for an emergency contact when they cannot be reached. Do any snowbirds hangar at your airport? How do you reach them in the winter?

You should know what materials are being stored on the airport. How much chemical does the aerial applicator store in their hangar? Are people storing flammables or materials that will give off toxic fumes in their hangars? At least once a year you should walk through the buildings on the airport with a representative of the fire department and keep the hangars from becoming hazardous.

When you can answer all these questions try having a drill to exercise your emergency plan. You will probably come up with another list of questions just as long. If you would like some help preparing an Airport Emergency Plan tailored to your airport give us a call at the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Office of Aeronautics. Our Operations staff would be happy to work with you.