



ROB STROUD, JOURNAL GAZETTE/TIMES-COURIER

Pictured, from the left, are Mattoon firefighters Adam Whalin and Trent Coy practicing rescuing passengers and suppressing a fire during an airplane accident scenario Thursday afternoon at the City Hall fire station. They utilized an Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Mobile Simulator that was borrowed from the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

Mattoon firefighters train for plane crashes

Fuselage simulator offers victim rescue, firefighting practice

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MATTOON — Firefighter Adam Whalin climbed through the open hatchway of a downed airplane and retrieved the lone occupant as his colleague, Trent Coy, kept a steady stream of

fire-suppressing water pouring around this exit Thursday afternoon.

These two Mattoon Fire Department crew members, wearing full protective gear, were practicing with an Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Mobile Simulator, which included a simulated airplane accident victim in need of rescue. The training session took place next to the water tower at the City Hall fire station.

Andrew Fearn, manager of the Coles County Airport Authority, said Mattoon firefighters held a series of training sessions this week using the airplane simulator from the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport and the firetruck from the Coles airport. The equipment on this firetruck includes a turret that can be used to spray water on a burning airplane while the truck is still in motion.

Mattoon Fire Department Engineer Mike Ueleke said their

department has firefighters on staff with the training experience needed to instruct their fellow crew members about aircraft rescue and firefighting. He said having the fuselage simulator and the airport firetruck available gives them the real world tools they need to provide this instruction.

"We are all better hands on learners," Ueleke said.

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Mattoon personnel regularly conduct aircraft rescue and firefighting training so that they can meet the regulations for their department being the primary fire service provider for an airport the size of the Coles County Memorial Airport, Ueleke said.

For example, Ueleke said a Mattoon fire crew is posted at the airport whenever a sports team that is visiting Eastern Illinois University arrives in a large jet airliner.

He said they must be on post an hour before this plane lands and remain there an hour after it takes off as a safety precaution.

Ueleke said Mattoon firefighters have trained at Scott Air Force Base in the St. Louis Metro East area and at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. At O'Hare with the Chicago Fire Department, he said Mattoon firefighters have gotten to experience battling controlled blazes within airplane fuselages.

Whereas structure firefighting typically includes a major effort to control and extinguish the fire while rescuing occupants, Ueleke said aircraft firefighting is focused initially on suppressing the fire enough to get the passengers, airplane crew and emergency responders safely out the hatch.

Mattoon firefighters practiced this scenario,

while maintaining social distancing, in sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday by using the airport truck's turret and their own hose lines to spray water

around the hatch of the Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Mobile Simulator.

"Mainly we are trying to protect that egress path," Ueleke said.

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