

# Airport report

## Preparing for an Airport Disaster

**By Iftikhar Ahmad**  
Director of Aviation

On Saturday, July 6, 2013, an Asiana Airlines flight from Seoul crashed on landing at San Francisco's airport causing fatalities, injury to more than 160 passengers with surviving passengers and crew scurrying to safety from the badly damaged Boeing 777, before it burst into smoke and flames. Emergency rescue vehicles were immediately present with fire trucks put into action spraying their white fire retardant foam on the crash site. This is a tragedy we hope never happens at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, but unfortunately history shows it has albeit many years ago. This disaster is a perfect example of why our emergency response team must be ready for anything at anytime. To successfully do so, the New Orleans Aviation Board (NOAB) and staff have prepared emergency plans for small and large scale occurrences that are regularly tested with various on-going training exercises.

This month, our staff will be joined by law enforcement and first responders from the surrounding parishes to participate in the mandated, tri-annual Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) disaster drill. Airports are required to conduct the live full-scale planned exercise every three years to evaluate a response to a regulated disaster. Every other year, a table top exercise is conducted in a classroom type setting. Each drill involves a simulated incident that will vary in theme and in the case of the tri-annual exercise, responders do not know the nature of the emergency until their arrival at the scene. The purpose of the drill is fourfold; 1) To successfully put into action the Airport Emergency Response Plan; 2) Evaluate its effectiveness; 3) Identify any areas that may be deficient or need additional development and; 4) To introduce the airport to first responders should they ever be called upon for assistance. The live exercise this month will involve role playing by the NOAB staff, actual use of emergency equipment at a designated site on the airport campus and even participation by an area hospital. At the conclusion of the drill, a review by all participants will take place to evaluate the success of the exercise and how to improve the response should an actual disaster take place. To alleviate any possible alarm on the part of our community, the public will be given notice prior to the drill.

As most of our readers know, we have recently completed a multi-million dollar modernization of the terminal. Two safety related projects were part of the Capital Improvement Project. First is the construction of a new \$14 million Airfield Rescue and Fire Fighting Facility (ARFF). This critical life-safety project now houses millions of dollars of emergency response equipment and members of the New Orleans Fire Department

who are the first responders that serve the airport with EMT and fire emergency support. It is located west of the terminal and replaced an antiquated facility that was not able to house the newer emergency response equipment. As I previously stated, training for emergencies is ongoing at the airport. This new structure also has a training facility where fire personnel assigned to the Airport can train and host mutual aid training sessions for neighboring fire departments that may respond to any potential airport emergencies.



The second project is a Security System which included the construction of a new high tech Emergency Operations Center. This Center is the terminal command center during airport emergencies of all sizes and is staffed by the New Orleans Aviation Board (NOAB) staff and first responders. It was partially activated with NOAB staffers during the Super Bowl to monitor terminal activity for any problems that might have needed an immediate response. It will be fully activated for the tri-annual exercise.

As I have stated in the past, the safety of our passengers, neighbors and staff is the number one concern of the NOAB. Through careful planning and continuous training for emergencies, we can rest assured that should a disaster strike we will be prepared. ✈



*Iftikhar Ahmad, Director of Aviation for Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport may be reached at [director@flymsy.com](mailto:director@flymsy.com). You can follow the airport on Facebook at [facebook.com/MSYAirport](https://www.facebook.com/MSYAirport) and Twitter @NO\_Airport. Also, view "Airport Alive" on the airport website, [www.flymsy.com](http://www.flymsy.com).*

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