

Avondale college, 2 police agencies stage mock standoff

by **Jackee Coe** - Mar. 22, 2010 09:04 AM
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The calm that enveloped the Estrella Mountain Community College campus in Avondale on Monday morning soon was disrupted as gunshots rent the air - part of a joint training exercise the school staged with the Avondale and Goodyear police departments.



Mock shooting drill at Estrella Mountain Community College

During the drill, an instructor playing the part of the gunman, using a toy gun, "shot" several people around campus before barricading himself in a classroom and taking the teacher and students hostage.

The campus' public safety officers responded first, followed quickly by Avondale and Goodyear's SWAT teams. Units worked quickly to safely remove the injured and begin negotiations with the shooter. The mock standoff lasted about an hour and a half before he released the hostages and surrendered.

Though it was only an exercise, police made it as realistic as possible so officers can be prepared in a real situation.

"It's extremely important that the teams work together cohesively, work well together, work fluidly, because in a situation like an active shooter in a school, realistically you have pandemonium going on," Avondale spokesman Reuben Gonzales said. "When we come in, we have to know exactly what our

ultimate goal is: Find the active shooter . . . and put a stop to the shooting immediately."

"Hopefully, we'll never ever, ever have to do something like this, but in the event it does occur, we would be better prepared," he said.

EMCC officials closed the school on April 17, 2007 - one day after the Virginia Tech shooting - after receiving a three-page typed letter containing a shooting threat.

The college "reviewed and enhanced" its response plan after the threat and has practiced its response every semester since then, said marketing and public relations coordinator Carissa Pool. Monday's drill was a way for the college to partner with the closest police departments.

"It's good for them (police) to be able to get onto the campus so they can know our campus (and) . . . be able to see how they can work together with our public safety office," Pool said. "But it's also a training exercise for our administration and our emergency plan that we do have in place at the college."

Criminal justice students played the roles of the victims, while criminal justice instructor

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