

Black Sheep host first responders

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MANCHESTER — The issues of safety, organization and preparedness were discussed in detail as about 200 Ocean County first responders met at a seminar hosted by the Ocean Black Sheep squadron at Manchester High School last night.

The detailed, PowerPoint presentation was designed to help local emergency personnel understand what they can expect if they happen to be called to an accident, specifically an aircraft crash scene.



Federal Aviation Administration safety program coordinator Eileen landola was one of the featured speakers.

"The mission of everyone in the room is to save lives," said landola. "We want to help everyone to do their work at a crash site efficiently and effectively."

The seminar was the first of its kind in the county in that it brought together local volunteers, police, pilots, medical professionals and FAA personnel to communicate about the proper methods and techniques that should be used in an emergency situation, according to Black Sheep

Squadron safety officer and public relations director Mike Maino.

"At a crash site, there are two different mindsets among the people responding," said Maino. "The first responders want to get in there right away and save lives. Meanwhile, the FAA and its investigators want to preserve the site and treat it as a crime scene. It's a tricky situation."

The seminar is a follow-up to the airplane crash that took place in Stafford Township on May 31 of last year. In that incident, four people died as a single-engine Piper Dakota disintegrated before crashing in a field just off Route 72.

"There were some communications problems among all the agencies involved," said Maino. "Hopefully this will help prepare everyone when something like that happens again."

The Ocean Blacksheep Squadron (oceanblacksheep.com) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization that provides air patrol services to Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Dr. Parvez Dara, a Toms River physician and pilot, accentuated the need for first responders providing air search and surveillance services to the Ocean County Sheriff's Department and the county Office of Emergency Management to understand the health risks they inherit just by appearing at an accident scene. Equipment such as gowns, masks and gloves should be used at all sites.

"Bacteria and viruses are everywhere and they can kill," said Dara. "If you don't have this rather inexpensive equipment with you at a crash site, you leave yourself open to exposure to some serious diseases."

Organizers said the seminar was an opportunity for regional personnel to network and discuss issues that are relevant to first responders.

There were numerous pamphlets, booklets and literature available to those who attended.

The meeting was originally scheduled to be held at Miller Air Park in Bayville but due to a large response, the seminar was moved to Manchester High School to accommodate the turnout.