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Officials Take Part in Safety Exercise

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Emergency preparedness focus of Jefferson County event

KEARNEYSVILLE - Numerous officials from throughout Jefferson County came together Friday night for an emergency preparedness exercise at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department in Kearneysville.

Representatives from almost every law enforcement agency, fire department and other emergency response organizations were present, along with county and municipal participants and members of federal agencies in Jefferson County.

The exercise, conducted by J.H. Consulting of Buckhannon, required the various agencies to work together to deal with a simulated emergency situation. The emergency Friday night was flooding in the Harpers Ferry area with an added HAZMAT element - propane - thrown into the mix, said Doug Britvec, project manager with J.H. Consulting.

"The 'table top' (exercise) is designed to allow different agencies with first response, fire, law enforcement, EMS, health departments, to all come together," Britvec said. "They're tasked with trying to come up with different ways to attack that problem based on their current emergency operations plan, standard operating guidelines, things like that."

One of the benefits of this type of exercise is that it might foster communications between agencies that don't regularly deal with each other.

"It gets them all together so that they can see what each other has, resource wise, and how they would respond," Britvec said.

Before the exercise started, Britvec told the participants that floods annually cause the most property damage compared with other natural disasters, killing about 150 people per year. Flooding is also the most costly type of natural disaster in Jefferson County each year, he added, resulting in more than \$20 million in damage over the past few decades.

The exercise was sponsored by the Jefferson County Local Emergency Planning Committee and the West Virginia State Emergency Response Commission. A second exercise is scheduled for later this month.