



Medic One Paramedics are Prepared for the Worst as They Learn from the Best in Ultra-Realistic Drills

Imagine this: You are among the first to arrive at the scene of a three vehicle collision. Two cars and a school bus are strewn over a 200-yard stretch of the roadway. Terrified screams echo from the bus, while the passengers in the mangled cars are eerily still and quiet.

A movie scene? A nightmare? No. It's a Multiple Casualty Incident (MCI) drill, a very real, hands-on simulation that is an annual feature of the Medic One Paramedic Training Program. During this full-day drill (organized and operated by South King County Fire and Rescue every May) paramedic students manage the sorting, treatment and transport of large numbers of patients. The drill is so complex, it requires dozens of firefighters, senior paramedics and civilian volunteers to assist and role-play.

The MCI drill is just one of many adrenaline-triggering drills paramedic students experience each year. Drills are the best way for students to "learn by doing" and make big mistakes – with no life-or-death consequences. Experienced senior paramedics are a big part of every drill, intently observing, debriefing and teaching.

Another annual drill, "Sick or Not Sick," is organized and operated each January by Shoreline Fire Department. Students are thrust into dozens of scenarios in which 9-1-1 has been called for a medical emergency. They must quickly determine whether patients need immediate medical treatment and transport to the emergency room, or whether their conditions are less serious. As the students interpret vital signs, interview patients and detect other clues, they must make a sick-or-not-sick decision within 90 seconds. Later, their decision time is shortened to just 45 seconds.

The students struggle mightily, and that is the point, says Paramedic Training Program Education Coordinator Jerry Ehrler. "Quick decision-making is the most critical skill for paramedics to have, and it's one of the toughest to develop. In this drill, we push our students off the fence. They must make quick decisions and justify their actions to a senior paramedic."

Ehrler adds, "At this point, in January, we're not too concerned that they make the *right* decision. That happens in the next several months of training, as their classroom knowledge and field experience really come together. For right now, we're pushing them through their own discomfort and uncertainty, forcing them to make what could be a life-or-death decision."

Seattle Paramedic Marci Grimsley graduated last summer with Medic One Class #35. She appreciates how difficult the drills were. During last year's MCI drill, for example, she struggled through a single scenario that included three crashed vehicles with fatalities, a conked-out fire truck blocking access and a two-way radio with dead batteries.



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“They really throw you some curveballs you’re not expecting,” Grimsley says. “But you know, I’ve never been on a call where everything went right. These bad things really do happen. I’m glad they prepare us for the worst.”