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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Idaho State Journal

Pocatello, Idaho

Thursday June 22, 2017

by Kendra Evensen

Page 1 of 2

Bingham Memorial Hospital trains for eclipse emergencies

In preparation for the Great American Eclipse that could draw hundreds of thousands of people to East Idaho on Aug. 21, Bingham Memorial Hospital in Blackfoot held an emergency drill on Monday.

Hospital officials say the event, which took place near Patriot Park and simulated a bus accident involving 11 people with varying injuries, was meant to test their emergency department staff and the national Incident Command System.

Officials say they want to be ready in case a similar emergency arises during the week of the eclipse, or if other hospitals in the area reach capacity and need help.

“While we always hold a few simulations each year, we are holding more this year in preparation for the anticipated increase in visitors to Eastern Idaho this August for the Solar Eclipse,” Jennifer Pugmire, emergency department manager at BMH, said in a news release.

“We want to be as prepared as possible. Simulations, such as these, are valuable practice experience for BMHs staff and community emergency responders.”

Many local governments, emergency responders and other organizations have been making similar preparations for the solar eclipse and the massive crowds that it is expected to draw.

According to an article from The Washington Post, the Idaho Falls area could be one of the best places in the nation to see the eclipse based on viewing conditions. The article, “How to avoid clouds that could spoil the Great American Eclipse,” says those in Idaho Falls will have a 78 percent chance of seeing the rare celestial event.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has provided a “Cloudiness Map,” available at www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/ready-set-eclipse, to help people determine where to go for the best chance of clear skies, based on previous cloud conditions for Aug. 21.

“Although the picture doesn’t particularly bode well at the coasts of Oregon and South Carolina, the chance for clearer skies appears greatest across the Intermountain West,” the website states. “If historical conditions hold true, Rexburg, Idaho, a two-hour drive west of Wyoming’s Grand Teton National Park, has a good chance for clearer skies. Casper, Wyoming, also holds promise. Other historically clear locations include Lincoln, Nebraska, and Carbondale, Illinois.”

NOAA officials say this will be the first time that a total eclipse has crossed the U.S. — it will go from Oregon to South Carolina — since 1979. And it’s the first time that one has traveled from coast to coast since 1918.

While many people are traveling to East Idaho for what could be a once-in-a-lifetime event, organizations like BMH are working hard to prepare for any emergencies and other complications that may arise.

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Pugmire says Monday's drill helped them determine what they can do to improve their efficiency in an emergency situation, and she's grateful to those who helped out during the event.

"We greatly appreciated all the volunteers who willingly gave up their mornings to assist us and for the local support of all of the first responders who were on duty," Pugmire said in the news release. "Without collaboration and support from the community, we wouldn't be able to have these tests to improve the quality of healthcare we deliver."

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