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Aliens from Space Attack Nacimiento Dam - Not!

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Drill helps Emergency Services workers prepare for real disaster

Space aliens using photon torpedoes Thursday destroyed Lake Nacimiento Dam. At least that's what Monterey County Office of Emergency Services Manager Harry Robins wanted local emergency officials to believe during a training exercise to test emergency preparedness. Although the alien scenario is unreal, Robins said the "functional exercise" prepares firefighters, police officers and county employees to deal with real disasters, such as floods, fires or earthquakes.

"What we try to do is to distract them," Robins said. "I'm going to try to make it as tough as they can for the OES staff. Because they are not going to learn if they don't make mistakes." During the three-hour training session, in which aliens from the planet "Mookai" attacked the dam, about 50 people representing various local and county agencies were subjected to a variety of disaster situations.

About 15 fire and law enforcement officials, posing as members of the public and press, asked questions via telephone that ranged from media requests to inquiries from concerned citizens worried about their homes and livestock. The other officials had to answer the questions correctly. "They are going to get phone calls from Congressman Sam Farr, asking 'What are you people doing (about the dam)?" Robins said. "It's a simulated Sam Farr. Everything is simulated."

The calls were actually made from the jury room, which is next to the OES office in the basement of the courthouse in Salinas. At the onset, Robins threw another curve ball to emergency officials. "I took myself out because I came down with the hives," Robins said. Concluding the session, Robins said it went well. "We always learn something that we can do differently to make improvements," he said.