

# The Hawk Eye

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## NEWS

# MedForce lands in Wever to provide training at Iowa Fertilizer Co.

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WEVER — The sound of rotating helicopter blades broke through the hum produced by Iowa Fertilizer Co. Monday as a MedForce helicopter emerged from the clouds.

Capt. Pat Glandon kept the aircraft clear of a nearby service tower, power lines and poles whose colors blended with the gray sky as he piloted the blue and yellow Eurocopter EC135 P3 toward the portion of gravel parking lot that had been prepped for the helicopter's arrival.

"They gave us good information when we were coming in," Glandon said of the Iowa Fertilizer Co. employees who provided him with site conditions via the plant's dedicated radio frequency as they took part in the day's medical response training.

It was MedForce's third visit to the nearly 14-million-square-foot Wever facility this month in an effort to better familiarize the plant's 59 EMS-certified employees with what to do in the event of a medical emergency requiring air evacuation. Air evac may be needed in the event of critical trauma, burns caused by or ingestion of chemicals, or severe falls, explained Brianna Wolf, a safety technician at IFC. MedForce has not yet had to respond to the facility for medical reasons.

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Wolf and other EMS-certified employees, who make up about one-fifth of IFC's nearly 250 workers, have been attending these trainings in small groups. One more MedForce-involved training is planned for April 27.

"We're the experts on our site," said Dan Walters, who oversees the plant's Health, Safety and Environment department. "We're the experts in handling our product, so we owe it to the community and to our employees to train to the level that we need to be at to respond to any type of emergency we could have here."

The MedForce crew are happy to assist in the emergency preparedness trainings following a year of few and far-between public relations events due to the pandemic.

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"COVID really slowed that down," said flight medic Mark Long, explaining that MedForce typically makes an appearance at numerous local emergency response trainings and EMS events, such as pancake breakfasts for local fire departments. "We're always excited for pancake breakfasts."

There are two MedForce helicopters. One is stationed at Great River Medical Center in West Burlington, and the other is based in Colona, Illinois, just outside the Quad Cities.

Aboard each flight are a medic and a nurse employed by MedForce who specialize in critical care.

"These guys are the cream of the crop," Glandon said. "I always say I'm their biggest groupie."

It's the job of the medic and nurse to safely load the patient and keep them stabilized in flight using equipment seen in emergency rooms and intensive care units. The helicopter flies in any type of weather but ice, and windy days can make for a bumpy ride.

Each base is staffed by four pilots employed by Shreveport, Louisiana Metro Aviation who work 12-hour shifts on alternating weeks.

Over the past eight years, Glandon has logged between 1,500 and 2,000 hours flying a EC135 P3 helicopter model. The U.S. Marine used his G.I. bill to learn to fly in New Iberia, Louisiana, after his father, who served as a flight medic, advised him to follow a different path than he took and consider a career as a pilot.

Since then, Glandon has logged a total of 4,000 flight hours. Pilots need a minimum of 2,500 hours to be considered for a position flying medical helicopters.

"It's really rewarding," Glandon said of his career.

The helicopter burns through one gallon of fuel per minute and can hold 150 gallons, or two hours and 10 minutes worth, of fuel at a time. Both the West Burlington and Quad Cities choppers respond to an average of between 30 and 40 medical emergencies each month,

transporting patients to and from hospitals in West Burlington, Iowa City and Peoria, Illinois, though they sometimes go as far as Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

Glandon aims to be in the air within five minutes of receiving a call, though weather sometimes can delay that effort by a few minutes.

It can land in a variety of terrain, though muddy fields are not ideal, so long as there are at least 100 square feet of clear space to land.

Once Glandon lands the helicopter and gives the go-ahead to first responders on the ground in the form of a thumbs up, they can approach the aircraft from the front and head to just past the rear of the cabin, where they must remain until cleared by MedForce crew to move to another location.

"Everybody wants to be back here until we get back here," Long told the group of IFC employees gathered near the back door of the helicopter, recommending hearing protection. "It's loud and it gets hot."

Long also pointed out the handle-shaped antenna located near the aircraft's back door that should not be used as a handle. The antenna's handle-like shape, he explained, prevents wind from blowing it about and damaging it.

IFC operator Aaron Dinwiddie said the hands-on training and interaction with MedForce staff made him more comfortable with the idea of calling in the helicopter should it be needed.

"It was a little overwhelming at first," Dinwiddie said, referring to classroom discussions about the training. "But it wasn't as intimidating as I thought it would be. Hopefully, it's something we'll never have to use."

He and his colleagues then made their way to the west side of an IFC fire truck, where they were shielded from the wind created by MedForce's rotor as it prepared to take flight.