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**NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**EMERGENCY MANAGERS GATHER TO PLAN FOR DISASTER**

Hollister, MO (January 31, 2012) - Leaders from public safety agencies throughout Taney County gathered at Taney County Ambulance District on Friday, January 27 to practice managing a local disaster. The virtual event presented a large aircraft emergency at Branson Airport. Representatives from local agencies discussed how their personnel and resources would respond to such an event.

"This exercise provided a great opportunity for responders to see each other in person and review emergency operation plans," said Chris Berndt, Taney County Emergency Manager. "Also, this allows agencies to finalize and review their plans prior to the full scale exercise in March."

Emergency managers and public safety personnel will gather for a full-scale disaster exercise at Branson Airport on March 3, 2012. The FAA requires Part 139 commercial service airports, like Branson Airport, to conduct a tabletop emergency drill annually and a full scale emergency drill every third year.

"Safety and emergency preparedness are two of our highest priorities at the Branson Airport," said Jeremy Berven, Director of Operations at Branson Airport. "This exercise, along with the drill in March, allows us and our community partners to focus on these items."

Just days ago, Southwest Airlines announced that it was committed to serving Branson Airport. It plans to convert AirTran Airways at Branson to Southwest Airlines operations over time. Southwest also announced that it will commence daily non-stop service from Branson Airport to both Chicago Midway Airport and Houston Hobby Airport starting April 16, 2012.

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*Picture 1 - The exercise was coordinated among leaders in the same way an Emergency Operations Center would be set up in a similar situation.*

*Picture 2 - Western Taney Fire Assistant Chief Bruce Bjorge shows a map of the Branson Airport to the group.*