

## DeSoto school buses to serve double duty during disasters

By Chris Van Tuyl

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DeSoto County school bus No. 108 wasn't full of kids Friday morning.

Instead, the interior featured a series of horizontal inter-frame connectors, angled header bars and ceiling pressure mounts.

It was a trial run of the AmbuBus, and through a grant provided by the Mississippi Department of Health, the county's emergency management agency has teamed up with the Magnolia State's largest school district to showcase a premier solution to disaster preparedness.

According to the First Line Technology [website](#), the bus stretcher conversion kit is "an effective and efficient solution for mass evacuation and transport of special-needs patients, casualties and others who require nonambulatory transport."

DeSoto County recently received two kits, which can hold up to 24 individuals on two full-size buses or four of the shorter buses.

"This was our first chance to exercise it and we've still got some work to do to make sure we can maximize its effectiveness," DCS director of transportation John Caldwell said. "We're learning it and hopefully we'll have it as an asset for the community."

The agency already had the school system's complete fleet of nearly 400 buses at its disposal, but deputy director Tim Curtis still contacted Caldwell and DCS Supt. Milton Kuykendall for their input.

"We discussed it and decided it was something we definitely wanted to participate in," Curtis said. "When you look at it, an ambulance can carry two patients that are on stretchers. We can carry 12 on the bus, so if you're evacuating a hospital or nursing home, they can really come in handy."

Curtis, who along with chief deputy director Chris Olson visited the district's bus barn in Southaven on Friday, recalled several instances where the AmbuBus would've served a significant purpose in the past, including Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"Most recently, during the spring floods, there were a couple of nursing homes that were in danger of the Mississippi River flooding," Curtis said. "Unfortunately, we didn't have our kit yet. With us being the farthest north, we're getting our stuff last."

Caldwell is also aware of the earthquake danger zone in Memphis, which lies on the New Madrid fault line.

"We're one day better prepared than we were yesterday," he said.

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