Bicton Horse Trials prompted by DAA to use what3words

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Devon Air Ambulance are once again taking part in what3words summer campaign to raise awareness and urge the public to download the app to #KnowExactlyWhere.**

* Devon Air Ambulance, along with other UK emergency services are urging supporters to download the free what3words app that can provide callers with their exact location
* Devon Air Ambulance often use the what3words app to help locate patients across the county

Devon is a county made up of stunning, but rural and sometimes dangerous beauty spots like Dartmoor and our incredibly scenic coastal paths that both locals and tourists alike will flock to for their summer adventures.

This week Devon Air Ambulance (DAA) is working in partnership with what3words to gear up for a busy summer across the county, urging the public to download the free app as a simple way to be prepared, helping them to save vital minutes and resources in emergency situations.

Over the last 2 years, DAA have been working closely with local organisations such as Bicton Arena and the Bicton International Horse Trials team to improve their protocols by including a what3words location in high-risk areas. When a serious fall at Bicton International Horse Trials occurred in May 2023, the HEMS (Helicopter Emergency Medical Services) Desk despatched the Devon Air Ambulance (DAA) Helicopter to the incident.

Although given the site details by the HEMS Desk, Capt. Rich Tate, Senior Pilot, who was first on scene, found it difficult to pinpoint the precise location of the incident. Due to the incident occurring under tree cover, the on-site land ambulance and injured rider were all hidden from his aerial view.

Delays such as these can take up valuable time as the helicopter has to orbit above the whole site to ascertain the best place to land. It was also stressful for the crew as they knew the rider needed their urgent care. Once Rich managed to locate and land it was quickly established that they needed to bring in the second helicopter for further medical back up, a much swifter process since an ideal landing location had now been identified.

Sue Fallon, Flight Operations Administrator for Devon Air Ambulance, said: ‘*We came up with the idea that as every fence on the cross country course has a dedicated fence judge, already armed with a list of information to hand, by simply adding the what3words location to each jump, the judge would be able to inform the HEMS desk dispatchers of this unique code, equipping them with the precise location of the fall. In turn this would mean that the pilot can go swiftly and directly to the exact incident location as possible.’*

Helen West, Co-Director at Bicton fully embraced this idea, and for October 2024’s International Horse trials Helen collated the relevant what3words for each jump. This information was shared with every jump judge, Chief Steward and First Aider in attendance as well as Devon Air Ambulance and the HEMS desk ahead of the event.

Capt Rich Tate said that ‘what3words references are significantly better, and indeed a game changer, for any incident as it pins down the landing spot to a 3-metre area rather than a grid reference which can be up to 100 square metre + location point. This means that all the onboard flight equipment can be programmed in quickly and efficiently directing me or any other pilot to the exact location, saving critical time in conveying the medical team straight to the patient.

This simple addition to the pre-planning of any event could prove vital in getting the right resource to the exact location as efficiently and safely as possible in the event of an accident or incident.’

Helen West added ‘Eventing is a high-risk sport, and we are incredibly grateful to DAA for the support they have provided to us and our competitors over the past few years. We are always looking to improve and enhance our SIM protocols and over the past 12 months we have been working closely with DAA to look at how we can speed up the landing of helicopters (air ambulance) should an accident occur. One of the new processes we have implemented is a system whereby we provide a W3W reference for every cross-country fence location, as well as key ***rendez vous*** points on our event site.

It really does provide us with greater confidence of being able to get the right treatment to patients in the quickest timeframe. I honestly believe this could be a game changer and would urge other events (both British Eventing affiliated events as well as non-equestrian events) to do the same. Don’t just think of W3W as a geographic tool for use for individual emergencies, it plays a vital role in event safety planning for events, both large scale and small.’

The use of what3words in pre-planning isn’t only important in high-risk activities such as Eventing. With Brits across the county already making the most of all the UK has to offer in summertime, thousands will be out walking, heading to the beach and enjoying road trips. Research revealed that Brits aren’t adequately prepared.

*‘What’s the address of the emergency?’* is one of the first questions asked when calling 999 but describing where help is needed can be difficult and stressful, especially in unaddressed or unfamiliar areas. New research highlighted that many people would struggle to describe meeting points in forests (40%), on country roads (39%) and campgrounds (34%), which could lead to a delay in locating a caller when every minute matters.

what3words provides a solution and has created a simple way to communicate very precise locations. It has divided the world into a grid of 3 metre squares and given each square a unique identifier consisting of three words: a what3words address. This means that every viewpoint along a hiking trail, stadium entrance, picnic spot in the park and tent on a campground has its own what3words address.

The what3words app works offline, making it ideal for use in areas with an unreliable data connection, such as popular summer destinations like festivals, beaches, national parks and campsites. what3words is available in over 60 languages to date, including Welsh. It is free to download on iOS and Android, and can be accessed via the online map at what3words.com

To read more about DAA’s use of the what3words app, visit: <https://www.daat.org/News/what-3-words-the-app-that-everyone-is-downloading>