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CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

The ability to communicate information about an event, its impacts, what is being done and what must be done is essential after earthquakes and other emergencies.

Recent disasters have shown that telephone and other communications systems might not be available when they are needed.

The magnitude 6.7 Northridge earthquake on January 17, 1994, caused limited interruptions in service due to damaged telephone lines as well as equipment malfunctions.

The problem became worse when many southern California residents tied up the lines with calls. In fact, the number of calls at one central office increased from 2,000 to 250,000 per hour.

Damage to the phone system or overloading in a future earthquake might make it difficult for affected persons to obtain assistance.

Your neighborhood can enhance its ability to contact emergency response agencies by including emergency communications personnel and equipment as part of its neighborhood response plan.

SELECTING A TEAM

Your neighborhood planning committee should review the skills surveys completed by residents to identify a coordinator and members of the communications team.

Reducing the Risk in 1996



Monthly Preparedness Items and Actions

January

Understanding the Threat

February

Start It Up

March

Neighborhood Hazard Reduction

April

Community Resources

May

Neighborhood Emergency Supplies

June

Neighborhood Response Teams

July

Skills Training

August

Emergency Shelter

September

Assessing the Damage

October

Search and Rescue

November

Creative First Aid

December

Plan Your Drill

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Because of their training and the likely effectiveness of their equipment, licensed radio operators are best-suited to serve on this team.

If no one in your neighborhood has such skills, your planning committee might want to canvass other neighborhoods for qualified persons.

PRE-QUAKE ACTIVITIES

Once your communications coordinator and team have been identified, preparations for future emergencies should begin. The communications team should:

- Identify a communications center; the communications center can be located at your coordination center or another designated location
- Ensure that battery powered radios and televisions are available for monitoring newscasts
- Identify local radio stations that are part of the Emergency Alert System
- Review the surveys completed by each neighbor to ensure that each has an out-of-town contact (it's much easier to call outside the area)
- Remind neighbors to use their phones only in an emergency
- Be aware that road conditions can make travel by car impossible
- Consider other methods of sending messages, including:

- bicycle
- motorcycle
- horseback

Remember: Plan for the worst, hope for the best!

POST-QUAKE ACTIVITIES

After an earthquake, members of the communications team should:

- Report to the designated site
- Utilize citizens band (CB) and ham radios, as needed, to communicate information to emergency agencies
- Monitor radio and television reports regarding emergency instructions, damage to hospitals, roads and lifelines, the opening of shelters and other information
- Post and update situation reports at designated sites
- Use ham or CB radios to help residents reach out-of-town contacts if phone service is disrupted

COMMUNICATION TIPS

The information you provide and how you provide it to local officials and residents of your neighborhood is important. Concise, detailed and accurate data will help emergency agencies assess the impact of the emergency in your area.

Designate a community liaison to coordinate the transfer of information to local officials and neighbors. Key information the community liaison should provide to local officials includes:

- Number of people injured
 - seriously
 - moderately
 - slightly
- Number of people missing
 - probable locations
- Number of fires
 - addresses

- Number of buildings damaged, locations and severity
 - habitable/damaged
 - uninhabitable
 - destroyed
- Broken utility lines
 - type
 - number of each

Communicating key safety and response information to neighbors can save lives, reduce injuries, save property and help maintain morale. Key information to provide neighbors includes:

- Safety actions such as moving items from high shelves, checking water and food supplies, anticipating aftershocks, etc.
- Priorities and activities being conducted by neighborhood response teams



This document was adapted from the OES publication "Organizing Neighborhoods for Earthquake Preparedness."

The *ESP Focus* and *Bulletins* are only suggestions for preparing your neighborhood. You need to use discretion and common sense in your relationships with neighbors.



WHAT IS ESP ?

ESP is an awareness campaign designed to increase earthquake preparedness. ESP was developed by the County of Los Angeles. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services and representatives from Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties assist in the development of campaign materials and in coordination of the campaign.

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