

# Neighborhood Preparedness Program

## Organizational Guide

### For Disaster and Emergency

#### Preparedness

*The information contained within this manual is intended to provide examples how to effectively organize neighborhoods to be sufficiently prepared for emergencies and disasters. This information has been compiled using a variety of sources and its intended use is only as a guideline for better preparedness. Though we promote the importance of community and neighborhood emergency and disaster preparedness, it is up to each individual in each neighborhood to determine their own capabilities and willingness to be a participant in an organized preparedness plan. Community and neighborhood leaders are encouraged to develop their own individual plan that meets their specific needs according to their unique location, surroundings and residents. We assume no responsibility for any actions taken by anyone who elects to participate in this program, or for any current or future damages that may arise as a result of those actions.*

*Individuals acting in times of disaster are offered certain protection under Florida Statutes 768.13 and 768.1355.*

## Overview

Hurricane, evacuation, disaster and emergency preparedness campaigns have consistently stressed the importance of individual and family self-sufficiency for a period lasting anywhere from three days to one week following a disaster or major emergency. However, we have recently seen that being prepared for at least two weeks would be a better scenario. During these types of situations, law enforcement, fire rescue and emergency medical service responders will likely be overwhelmed, understaffed and unable to meet the demands for emergency assistance.

An organized and structured Neighborhood Preparedness Program can be very effective in meeting the critical first needs of participating community members. We strongly encourage those involved in community or neighborhood watch programs to implement a structured and organized emergency preparedness plan.

## Goals

The goal of this program is to ensure neighborhood self-sufficiency for a pre-determined period of time following an emergency or disaster. The time period, set by the community leaders, should be between 72 hours and two weeks.

This will be accomplished by organizing into units consisting of 25 households, each lead by a Neighborhood Disaster Team. Each team member will be assigned specific duties and responsibilities, will be assisted by neighborhood volunteers and will meet with other team members on a regular basis.

## Organization and Structure Progression Guide

**Local Neighborhood** forms neighborhood disaster committee which includes a chairperson and other members who develop a Neighborhood Disaster Plan, which includes a Neighborhood Coordinator who oversees Neighborhood Liaisons and Neighborhood Teams.

**Organized Neighborhoods** form the basis for a Community disaster Council which includes a chairperson and representatives from neighborhoods, local government, community agencies, and others who develop a Community Disaster Plan which includes Community Coordinators, Liaisons and Teams or Divisions.

**Local Government/Fire Departments** develop a Disaster Plan which utilizes Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS), which centers the authority in an Incident Commander who oversees Divisions, which include preparedness, response and recovery operations.

## **Using This Guide**

This guide was developed to assist you in organizing your neighborhood, using resources within your community, while avoiding the usual pitfalls or “reinventing the wheel”.

### **Helpful Definitions:**

**Community** - Any contiguous area where people live and work, whether they are defined by a government agency or not. This includes apartment complexes, condominiums, regional and rural neighborhood areas, office buildings, towns, etc.

**Community Disaster Council** - A larger network of community representatives from neighborhoods, businesses, local organizations and community groups who work together before and after a disaster to meet the disaster needs of a community. This includes representation from organized neighborhoods within its boundaries.

**Community Disaster Plan** – An organized, written plan for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery within a community, implemented through support of neighborhoods and neighborhood plans.

**Neighborhood** – A smaller area, determined by city blocks, natural terrain, social or cultural enclaves, or any other its residents consider themselves as a “group”.

**Neighborhood Disaster Committee** – A “disaster council” within a neighborhood that finds itself individually organized within a larger, unorganized community.

**Neighborhood Disaster Plan** – An organized, written, and implemented disaster preparedness plan that includes neighborhood response and recovery plans involving neighborhood coordinators, liaisons and teams.

**Neighborhood Coordinator** – Person designated as the neighborhood leader for the disaster plan. This person acts as the liaison between that neighborhood, other neighborhoods and the larger Community Disaster Council. If there is not a Community Disaster Council, this person would be the chair of the neighborhood Disaster Committee.

**Neighborhood Liaison** – Person designated to work within the neighborhood or some part of it, with the existing and new neighbors, conduct disaster assessments during a disaster and report to the Neighborhood Coordinator.

**Neighborhood Disaster Teams** – Groups of neighbors organized and trained to fulfill a specific purpose during a disaster. Some examples are first aid or search and rescue.

**Disaster Resource Directory** – A written record of all pertinent, priority disaster response information utilized by neighborhood coordinators and liaisons during a disaster.

**Other Resources:**

There are many good disaster preparedness publications that provide information about organizing neighborhoods. Unfortunately, many address only one type of disaster and none of them address everything. Your job as the initial organizer(s) is to gather as much information as you can, organize the information, keep what you deem appropriate, discard what you deem unnecessary and restructure the information to suit the needs of your community or neighborhood.

**Life Cycles:**

A neighborhood disaster preparedness project is never complete. At best it is a continuing, evolving and adapting process that changes due to residents, local governments, volunteers and technology.

**Volunteer management:**

It is very important to remember that those members of your neighborhood who participate in this project do so as volunteers. Managing volunteers takes special awareness and skill. Many nonprofit organizations have developed techniques, materials and insight on how to manage volunteers successfully. The basic components of a successful volunteer program are:

1. Setting the climate of the organization so volunteers are valued contributors
2. Defining the work that volunteers are needed for (writing job descriptions)
3. Recruiting volunteers
4. Orientation and training for volunteers
5. Supervising volunteer work progress
6. Volunteer recognition
7. Evaluation of volunteer performance
8. Evaluation of overall volunteer program

The above steps are an integrated cycle. For a strong and growing group, no step can be omitted. They are also a sequence. For example, volunteer recruitment should come after the work has been defined and only after the organization has reflected on the roles that volunteers will hold.

**Congratulations are always accepted**

It is very important to acknowledge your group's accomplishments, whether small or large. This will go a long way in alleviating the potential fear of a disaster, build additional confidence and help to make the residents more self-sufficient in dealing with the first hours of a disaster.

Sometimes, usually during the planning stages, the scope of disaster preparedness can often be overwhelming to those participating in the preparedness efforts. Bench marking events can be an important stress relieving component of any long-term project.

Disaster preparedness and readiness to respond to disasters will result in the reduced property damage, fewer injuries and saved lives. Remember that this project is a life-giving effort and the individuals and families who live in your neighborhood will be safer and better prepared because of the work you will have done.

## **Research Information**

Before you get too involved in the planning stages, you should do some background research to find out what is already being done. This will save you valuable time and effort, especially if there are existing organizations that can support your efforts. It will also avoid misunderstanding with other emergency response groups.

During the research process, you will gain important knowledge as to who the major players are in your community and county and how they can help your neighborhood become better prepared. This will be the first steps you will take to start building your own disaster network.

Start by contacting the departments listed below. Be sure to record the names, titles, positions, contact numbers and information for future reference. This will become part of your Disaster Resource Directory.

### **1. County Office of Emergency Management**

**(321) 637-6670**

The County Emergency management office works with government agencies and groups within the county to promote and assist in developing disaster preparedness. During a disaster, EMO coordinates the response of government agencies. Depending upon the magnitude of the disaster, it can call on state and federal levels for additional relief assistance, such as FDEM and FEMA.

- Does the EMO program include organizing neighborhoods for disaster? If so, what kind of training, where, when, and how much does it cost?
- Can an EMO representative speak at neighborhood meetings?
- Do they provide disaster pamphlets, videos or other materials for use in the community?
- Do they know of any other disaster related organizations or groups that meet regularly? If so, who where and when do they meet?

### **2. County Sheriff's Resource Officer**

**(321) 225-3008**

The Brevard County Sheriffs Office community resource officer is available to answer your questions about the neighborhood and business watch programs.

- Have other County Neighborhoods developed Disaster Plans?
- Would they be willing to share their information?

### **3. Fire Rescue Department**

**(321) 633-2056**

Your local fire department plays an important role in any community disaster plan. In unincorporated areas, the fire department usually becomes the authoritative body during a disaster while fire departments in incorporated towns and cities will rely on direction from the local government bodies. Once you begin having organizational meetings, it is critical to have fire department representatives participate.

- Are there other disaster preparedness groups, Community Disaster Councils or organized neighborhoods within the fire district? If so, how can I contact them?
- Would the fire department be willing to participate in the meetings?
- Do they offer disaster training for neighborhoods? If so, what kind of training, where, when and what is the cost?
- Do they have disaster pamphlets, videos or other resources for use at Watch meetings?

#### **4. Local Red Cross Office**

**(321) 890-1002**

The American Red Cross (ARC) is mandated by the federal government to respond to the needs of citizens during a disaster. The local ARC chapter usually meets the day-to-day disaster needs of the county such as family fires, small disasters, safety and disaster training, etc. If the local chapter is small and unable to fulfill these needs, they usually request expertise from another ARC chapter or the regional offices. If a major emergency occurs, trained volunteers will be recruited from outside the disaster area to help with the response.

- Can they provide speakers for neighborhood meetings?
- What training do they offer? When and where is the training held? Do they provide training workshops in your area? Do they charge for disaster services?
- Do they provide disaster pamphlets, videos, etc. to the communities?
- Have they designated any sites in your community to be designated disaster shelters? If so, which buildings or locations?

#### **5. Local Humane Society**

**(321) 636-3343**

Some Humane societies have developed plans for the rescue of pets and large animals during a disaster.

- If the Humane Society has a disaster program for animals, can they provide you with written information to be distributed at neighborhood watch meetings?
- Would a representative be willing to speak at one of your meetings?
- Do they train others to help with animal rescue during disasters?
- If they currently have no program available, would they be willing to prepare some information that would be useful to persons interested in caring for their pets during a disaster?

#### **6. State Emergency Response Team**

The State Emergency Response Team (SERT) is a collaboration of Florida's state agencies led by the state coordinating officer. SERT's mission is to ensure that Florida is prepared to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate their impacts. Visit [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org) for the latest information on the hurricane relief efforts.

#### **7. Emergency Contacts**

In planning for a disaster, you should learn about the emergency departments located in your community and their services. Before, during, and after a disaster, listen closely to the information they provide. They will supply you with details regarding the disaster event; including shelters openings/closings, safety tips to consider, and instructions to follow to ensure your safety. These emergency departments are here for your protection; please be sure to listen closely and follow their instructions in a disaster event.

Brevard County Emergency Management  
Robert S. Lay  
1746 Cedar Street  
Rockledge, FL 32955  
Phone: 321-633-1770  
Fax: 321-633-1738  
<http://embrevard.com>

Red Cross - Brevard County  
Space Coast Chapter  
1700 Cedar Street  
Rockledge, FL 32955  
Phone: 321-890-1002  
Fax: 321-890-1016  
<http://www.redcross.org/fl/brevard>

## **Organizing your Information**

Once you have completed your research, you will have a lot of information. Most of it will be useful and some of it will not. Your next steps will be to:

### **1. Organize the information:**

Most of the information you have gathered will be valuable in proceeding with your NDPP. Review what you have gathered and highlight the related implications to your community.

- Is there a Community Disaster Council available?
- Is there any organized neighborhood training available through the fire dept or County EM?
- Which ones have paid staff versus dedicated volunteers?

You will also have learned that your specific geographical location will determine the potential types of disasters your community needs to prepare for. While wildfires may be the greatest threat to some communities, flooding will be of a greater concern to others. You may also have more than one serious threat to your community. This information will determine which threats you need to emphasize when organizing your disaster teams.

The end goal for your community is to be prepared to meet a disaster, though each individual community will get there differently. You need to recognize that local governments will differ in their plans and level of activities, due to the differences in their structure, personnel and the level of demand for priority community issues. Though all entities are required to have written disaster plans, you will find that some are more active than others. For example, some will include community involvement while others will not. Since the increase in hurricane activity over the recent years, most governmental agencies are developing an increased awareness and interest in volunteer involvement in disaster preparedness and response, recognizing that trained volunteers will increase their workforce following a disaster and the benefits of establishing community networks before a disaster occurs.

Remember that organizing a community or neighborhood is a daunting task. It will take time, patience and persistence and will definitely be an on-going task. However, the knowledge of having a self-sufficient neighborhood, along with making new friends, new contacts, shared ideas and problems being solved is very rewarding.

### **2. Build a start-up team to help**

1. Enlist help from your friends.

As you begin to shape the goals and plan for your first meeting, you will need some help and assistance. The success (or failure) of a community or neighborhood plan will depend on the involvement and participation of many neighbors. Do not try to do all the work yourself.

Remember that a leader's job is to recruit and excite others with the vision of what is possible.

2. Set realistic goals.

Keep your goals as simple as possible. They should be a reflection of your neighborhood's needs and be attainable with a reasonable amount of work.

### **3. Define the neighborhoods within your community**

Neighborhoods can be defined by city blocks, streets, natural terrain or just about any other method you choose. However, the number of homes that establish a community should physically allow for an easy survey at the time of a disaster. The selected area should be easy to walk within a short period of time. Larger areas should be broken down into smaller enclaves.

Detailed maps used by the county, local fire departments and paramedics (usually referred to as “Run Maps”) are very useful in identifying neighborhoods. They are usually free, easy to obtain, and already used by fire departments and paramedics. Organized communities can use these maps to display such items as propane tank locations, water tanks, swimming pools, fire hydrants, power stations, or other resources that might have a positive or negative impact on a community during a disaster.

### **Schedule your first Neighborhood Disaster Preparedness Planning meeting**

The first step in developing a successful community disaster organization is to prepare each household for disaster. Unless the majority of households are prepared, it will be difficult to have a self-sufficient, organized neighborhood. This is why a meeting is the easiest way to start.

Once these tasks have been completed, you will be ready to set up your first neighborhood meeting.

1. Set a meeting time and place.

Using your startup team, select a time and location when a good number of your neighbors can gather. Neighborhood meetings work best if held within the neighborhood and in a neighbor’s home rather than in a restaurant or public building. People will generally share information more openly in a less formal setting, due to the friendly atmosphere. If the meeting appears more as a social gathering instead of a business meeting, you will likely receive more cooperation.

2. Recruit a meeting host.

The host’s role is to invite individuals to the meeting, share their personal interest in the need for neighborhood disaster preparedness and make everyone feel welcome. You may also want to divide the responsibilities and tasks of hosting a meeting.

3. Distribute invitations.

Invitations should be simple, direct and emphasize the importance of the meeting, which is to learn about community and household self-sufficiency, to meet local fire and paramedic personnel and to learn about available community resources. Invitations should be distributed no less than three weeks prior to the meeting date. You should also arrange for follow-up calls about three days before the meeting to confirm attendance.

### **Agenda and Objectives for first NDPP meeting:**

The goal of the first meeting is to get your neighbors together, build on the interest in disaster preparedness and to begin recruiting volunteers who have disaster related skills to help with the organizing process. There will always be neighbors who choose not to become involved. You cannot force people to be prepared. What you can and should do is keep them informed.

## **Suggested outline of topics for the first NDPP meeting is:**

- 1) Introduction and socialization
- 2) A presentation by local fire department or emergency management representatives will result in your neighbors taking a more serious look at what they need to do for their own survival. They can describe the location of responding station, number of personnel on each daily shift, physical areas of their services, their roles during different levels of emergencies and the value of neighborhood participation in their disaster plan.
- 3) A slide show presentation and narrative about their community and its resources is much more effective than a commercial disaster video.
- 4) Distribute household packets containing easy to read comprehensive disaster preparedness information reflecting the needs of the community.
- 5) Discussion on preparedness goals.
  1. Each household should be prepared for disaster with:
    - o A personal household plan
    - o Neighborhood disaster training (first aid, rescue, CPR, etc.)
    - o Supplies in place (home, car)
  2. Neighborhood will be self-sufficient and will have:
    - o Connection to a Community Disaster Council or Disaster Committee
    - o At least one Neighborhood Coordinator and one Neighborhood Liaison
    - o Teams of volunteers for:
      - o First Aid, Medical and Stress managers
      - o Search and Rescue
      - o Safety and Utilities
      - o Care of people with special needs
      - o Shelter and Feeding
      - o Communications
    - o Active link to local fire, rescue and law enforcement
  3. To accomplish our goals, our neighborhood will involve many volunteers who are good spirited, supportive of each other and remain committed to fulfilling the disaster needs of our community.
- 6) Description of volunteer roles, recruitment of volunteers
  1. Using the Job Position Description, describe the roll of the Neighborhood Coordinator and Neighborhood Liaison.
  2. Ask liaisons to take household packets to neighbors who did not attend the meeting. These are to be handed directly to an adult household member.
  3. Ask liaisons to pick up Neighborhood Disaster Registry forms from non-attending neighbors before the next scheduled meeting.
  4. Describe the other teams and ask for volunteers.
- 7) Decide on next steps along with next meeting date. This meeting should build on the first meeting. Neighbors who volunteered for positions should be at each meeting as well as others who may wish to help organize the community.

**Suggested objectives for the first NDPP meeting:**

- 1) Create a sense of urgency for developing personal preparedness for each household and within the neighborhood.
- 2) Distribute Household Packets to each household in the community.
- 3) Recruit volunteers for neighborhood coordinator and liaisons, if not already done. If the area needs to be divided, it may be necessary to recruit additional volunteers to coordinate between the different neighborhoods.
- 4) Recruit volunteers to start the Neighborhood Disaster Committee, or act as liaison to the Community Disaster Council.
- 5) Set a date for the second meeting.

**Tips for having a successful meeting:**

- 1) Record the meeting for future reference by taking notes. This will become part of your Disaster Resource Directory.
- 2) Ensure everyone signs in and has received a household packet.
- 3) Ask if there are any additional questions or comments. These should be brief and relevant.
- 4) Present a quick outline containing your vision of the neighborhood's disaster goals. Get others to compare their visions and goals with yours.
- 5) Participants of initial disaster preparedness meetings can often become overwhelmed by all of the information. Handouts should address specific audiences, i.e.: children, people with disabilities, animals, etc.
- 6) Thank everyone for attending. You can not thank volunteers enough.
- 7) Follow-up the meeting with written documentation of the meeting outcomes, including any assigned tasks or specific positions assigned

## The Second Neighborhood Meeting

### **Organizational Items:**

Before the second meeting:

- Remind neighbors and volunteers of the meeting date and time at least three days ahead
- Make a list of all materials you will need for the meeting
- Make copies for each attendee of any information that needs to be shared at the meeting including maps, documents, meeting outlines, etc.

During the second meeting:

- Recruit a co-chair and someone to record the minutes
- Ensure each attendee has a chance to participate
- Keep the meeting on track. Don't lose sight of the agenda and time frame
- Be flexible with ideas from others

Agenda for Second meeting:

- Determine the need for Neighborhood Disaster Committee, or participation in the Community Disaster Council
- Start developing a simple neighborhood disaster plan. You should begin with how it will function and who will do what
- Determine teams needed and outline each team's functions and responsibilities

### **1. Neighborhood Disaster Committee**

If your neighborhood is individually organized and prepared in the midst of an unorganized and unprepared community, you should have your own Neighborhood Disaster Committee. This committee should be comprised of members of the neighborhood, especially people with skills to coordinate teams, and others who can support the functions of the neighborhood organization. Every member should have a distinct role and it should be for the benefit of the neighborhood, not the individual.

### **2. Developing a Neighborhood Disaster Plan**

Remember to keep it simple. If your fire department or local government agency has a disaster plan and it is available to you, use it as a guide. If your community is organized and already fits into the community disaster plan, that plan will help determine what needs remain for inclusion into your neighborhood plan. You may also have access to other disaster plans from the organizations you previously contacted during the beginning of this project.

- The goals set at the first meeting can help structure a neighborhood disaster plan. Keep focus on the committee's functional role before and during a disaster.
- Form a committee to develop the plan and suggest that a date be set for completion. This should help in keeping the development teams on track.

### **3. Establishing Teams and Their Responsibilities**

Though the position of Neighborhood Coordinator and Liaison may have been previously filled, neighbors are needed to fill team positions and work on the details of their duties. Recruiting will be an on-going process due to neighbors moving in and out of the community. You may also require additional positions and duties that more accurately reflect the needs of your community.

#### **Before the Second Meeting Ends**

- Recap the meeting and call for questions or comments
- Make sure volunteers are clear about their duties and are comfortable with their responsibilities
- Ask for additional ideas for the next agenda
- Set a date for the next meeting. Remember that neighbors who participate in these programs are just as busy as you are and only want to meet when there is a good reason to do so. Don't schedule meetings unless there is a reason for the meeting to be held.

By the end of the second neighborhood meeting, your neighborhood has started developing an organizational structure to fit its unique needs in order to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters. This is a BIG accomplishment. What happens next is entirely up to you and your fellow neighbors.

#### **"What takes years to build takes only seconds to destroy"**

When disasters strike, they do not discriminate or differentiate amongst men and nations, poor or rich, young or old, disabled or healthy. They do not negotiate or listen or wait. They simply and quickly come, kill and destroy, causing irreparable losses of life and property. When these hazards strike, it is the communities who are first to react, it is the communities irrespective of their profession, status, cast or culture who need to react.

Therefore, it is important that the capacities of communities are built to observe, understand and prepare themselves for the worst impact. It is important to encourage communities to get involved, so that at the time of occurrence of disasters, they do not wait for help, they can stand on their own feet and mobilize self-help, before rescue and relief reaches them.

This has become even more evident with the exponential rise in the frequency of natural and man-made catastrophes hitting the nation during this decade, along with the inability of responsible federal and local governmental agencies to respond to these disasters in a timely and humane manner.

Therefore, it is imperative for every community to address the needs and importance of Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Management to work toward self-sufficiency in respect to preventive and mitigating measures in order to safeguard our vital assets (human & material) and minimize the impact of such catastrophes within our communities.