

Here's a summary of a very informative and brief meeting of the Emergency Preparedness Committee held Tuesday March 31, 2009.
Prepared by Sylvia Bews-Wright.

Kevin Pirie introduced the relevant team members (Pat Firth and Helen Malcolm for Ten Mile Point, Peggy Morfitt for Queenswood and Terry Carroll for the Village). We are praised highly for being the best organized community in ALL British Columbia, with a well-established planning structure. Saanich has the first full-time officer for disaster preparation (specifically what is required during the first 72 hours following a major event). Kevin introduced Captain Brock Henson, the new Emergency Program Officer for the Saanich Emergency Program. Captain Henson then gave us a presentation which included the following information.

For those interested, Saanich offers several 2-hour workshops during the year that outline specific steps each household should be aware of. The final one of the season is at Commonwealth Place this weekend (Apr 4), free but you must phone ahead to register.

We then had a succinct briefing on the most likely disasters to which we might be subject, namely:

1. Interface fires - should Haro Woods catch fire it would move upwards at such a rate we could only flee - no time to pack up!
2. Snowstorms and/or windstorms, with up to hurricane force winds with the likelihood of accompanying power outages for extended periods.
3. Seismic events - "the big one" which would be an earthquake measuring 7.3 or in excess (the Seattle one of recent memory was 6.8).
4. Tsunami triggered by an earthquake that lasts 60 seconds or more requires everyone to flee to higher ground (at least 20' above sea level in the case of Cadboro Bay, roughly up to Pepper's parking lot) and the houses along the beach area are at grave risk of liquefaction (collapse).
5. Floods or chemical spills - random but potentially grave events that might require immediate evacuation of specific neighbourhoods.

Because we live on an island, each household should be prepared to survive for SEVEN days since supplies from the mainland may be cut off entirely. Major supplies are FOOD - WATER (4 liters per person per day for cooking & washing) - HEAT - LIGHTING - SANITATION SUPPLIES (temporary toilet facility). TOP of the list for essential supplies are MANUAL can opener, analog (plug-in) telephone (do NOT expect your cell phone to work, especially if it is not charged and there is no electricity for a few days!) and crank wind radio/flashlight. You may source good kits and advice from CUSTOM SAFETY Shop.

Self sufficiency and neighbourhood help are the two keys to survival. The more education people in a community receive the better everyone will be should a disaster

occur. To this end, Saanich is now visiting at Grade 4 level to brief them beyond the basics of fire. The closest FEDERAL government help is based in Edmonton, where military assistance would be marshaled and dispatched as required. This would happen at the request of the PROVINCIAL government and it is unlikely help would be received earlier than day 3 or 4 after an event. At the MUNICIPAL level the various Regional authorities are now integrated to assist each other with ambulance/fire dispatch etc. The Recreation Centres around the region are designated shelters (this is in addition to our own community shelter and communications operations). Saanich municipal employees are being trained as teams to know their specific tasks (e.g. evacuation, social services, communications, search and rescue....) with plans being updated on a yearly basis.

One key to survival after a major disaster (remind yourselves that evacuation over the Malahat may not be an option) is termed "continuity". The sooner local businesses that supply many goods and services are up and running again the more benefit accrues to all. Damage and debris assessment is crucial (this includes carcass removal and disposal). Mitigation of the impact of a disaster is the major element in the planning at all levels of government. Remind yourselves of the consequences of poor management after Hurricane Katrina.

Further information may be obtained at www.sep.saanich.ca or from www.pep.bc.ca or from 250-475-7140.

Thank you to those who attended the meeting. Thank you to those who continue to be our loyal Street Captains - there's a lot riding on your shoulders! Enjoy the HERO status!

Cheers, Sylvia