

Emergency Preparedness, Part II

Neighborhood Café Show: Emergency Preparedness, Part II

Host: Paul Napier

In-Studio guests: Michael Fenton, American Red Cross

Nina Royal, Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council

Insert/Video Clip guest: Horace Penman, Community and Neighbors for the Ninth District
Unity (CANNDU)

Paul: Welcome to the Neighborhood Café. Here at the Neighborhood Café you can find great information pertaining to all Neighborhood Councils. Grab a cup of coffee, come in, and join the discussion. Would you be ready in case of an emergency? We all know that living in Southern California this is a concern to all residents and Neighborhood Councils. To help us get ready or an emergency here are our two guests, from the Sunland Tujunga Neighborhood Council, Nina Royal and from the American Red Cross, Mick Fenton.

Nina & Mike: Thank you for having us.

Paul: What are some of the things that people can do in preparing themselves for an emergency?

Nina: Aside of the standard of having water, supplies, and food, the next best thing is education. The more education via training that you get, then the more prepared and aware you are about what could happen and what you can do. Getting to know your neighbors, getting involved in community training classes should be a constant thing. It should become part of your life.

Paul: Is such information available or fostered through the Neighborhood Council?

Nina: Absolutely! Neighborhood Councils are constantly networking with other agencies. Tonight, for instance, our Neighborhood Council is having a Red Cross class scheduled.

Paul: Let us now get the American Red Cross perspective. What do you recommend?

Mick: Let me reiterate one important thing that Nina is saying. It is vital that you get to know your community, but it's also really important that you also start at home. Having a disaster plan at home is very important, especially if you have children. You need to sit down with them and discuss ways that they can get out of the house and certain considerations you want to take part in. Let me elaborate. If you live on a second floor and there's a fire how would you get out? Once you're out of the house, where will your family meet? How will you communicate?

Paul: These suggestions are also applicable during a flood, an earthquake, a riot or even something as severe as the repetition of 9/11.

Mike: People have different definitions of a disaster. Nevertheless you must be prepared. It is real critical that we talk of a plan, not only in your home, but at work or at school too. It's also important for kids to know their disaster plan at their institution.

Nina: There is information available from your local City Council Office, from the Fire Department, and from the Police Department. There are pamphlets that are out there that list everything an individual needs to do in order to be prepared like how to educate your children, and where your resources are. You pay for these things. They are part of the information that you as a taxpayer can get. The City of Los Angeles, through the Fire and Police Department helps out a lot by putting out this information. The County of Los Angeles also does too. I know that the county modeled their safety program after the City of Los Angeles.

It's important to understand that the more people that can be trained and spread this information with their neighbors, as well as with your co-workers, the more prepared we'll be. It's also good to network, which is part of what Neighborhood Councils do. You could turn around and say, "How is your safety program? Who is your safety officer? Where are your supplies?"

Paul: Is there any coordination at all through the American Red Cross Program or the Neighborhood Councils, as to emergency?

Mick: There is really no direct correlation with us. We assist in their planning. A lot of people do not know that in every school system, including the Los Angeles Unified School District, have to have its own disaster plan and supplies. Every teacher has to be trained in first aid and CPR. They actually have a plan in case of a disaster where to keep the kids that includes how long the students will be there, what supplies they have and how they are going to release the kids once it's safe.

Paul: While we have all these programs, and it is certainly news for some people, we all need to understand that this is continual re-education. Is there a repetition program that starts today and then ends? Is there something ongoing?

Nina: Neighborhood Councils are always trying to find innovative ways to help the community. Because of the fact that Neighborhood Councils have a limited amount of money, in February Sunland-Tujunga started an organization called the Sunland-Tujunga Safety and Emergency Response System. The purpose of this is to help evaluate what the community needs and also be able to raise funds to fulfill those needs.

While doing the research, we found out that some of our schools are really not well supplied. What it takes is constant vigilance, be it from the Neighborhood Council, so that we're all prepared. Let me give you an example. One thing on our "to do" list is to make sure that all the buildings in the community are identified with a number and that streets have signs that are identifiable.

Paul: This is something that all communities can do. We had the chance to visit with Horace Penman, who is president of Community and Neighbors for the Ninth District Unity. Horace is going to take us on a tour of the Emergency Preparedness Plan of his Neighborhood Council has put together in case of a disaster.

<<video clip>>

Horace: We are here at the multi-purpose community center, which is also a senior emergency center. Just in case there's an emergency, be an earthquake, flood, or any disaster, this is where the community will gather. This will be the shelter that even the Red Cross would come to.

This is the kitchen for the facility. We have designated this space a sleeping space and a feeding space where folks will come during an emergency. This area would be the food distribution point. Under this canopy are government bags, in which people could store their belongings in, such as their important valuables. The bags can also be used to store food because they probably wouldn't have access to their supermarkets. If we have an earthquake people can come down here and we can give them food to sustain them for at least a couple of days.

Another location that we have targeted is Fremont High School. It's important to know what resources you have in your neighborhood, such as a high school. As you can see the football ground and soccer field area is perfect for gathering a large number of people or even for helicopters to land on. CANDUU, working with Fremont High School, has designated this area as an emergency landing zone. If the roads are not accessible and there is no way to get equipment in or trucks to bring the equipment, we will be able to use this area of the campus for helicopter landing and to bring in food.

We're not at McKinley Avenue Elementary. Behind us is a little garage with a brown door. It looks like an ordinary small building, but inside that little garage are 55 gallons of treated water in barrels. Our Neighborhood Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the McKinley Ave. Elementary School. The school principal and the school personnel have agreed that at a certain time, in case of emergency, after school hours, we will be able to access the campus, and be able to open up those emergency facilities to sustain the community until the Red Cross or until the hazardous time has passed.

Unidentified Speaker: This is a horse ranch. It's called Queue-Up Inc. Ranch. There are approximately 100 horses, and in the area here there are approximately 200 horses. These horses are trained for a riot, which means that they are used to a lot of noise. These are good horses to bring into the city in case of an emergency. They provide excellent support in the inner city.

Unidentified Female Speaker: During an emergency it will be the horses that will become the means of transportation. They can move things around and we can move around with them. The Fire Chief would probably be the person in charge, so he will direct the horses on what to do.

Unidentified Male Speaker: The horses coming down from the ranch will come down from this trail. It will only take them 10 minutes to get to the inner city.

Horace: You have seen some of the plans that our Neighborhood Council has used and the resources in our community. Any Neighborhood Council could do the same. Just think about those resources you have in your community. Think about what you could use to bring about bringing the community together during an emergency. What can I bring together to help utilize and alleviate some of distress in my community? You will be surprised with what you come up with. We came up with horses. Brainstorming is the key! Remember that the life you save could be your own.

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Paul: Horace and his people have put together a very impressive preparedness program, I don't think that most people are aware of how much preparation they have done there. Are there similar preparation done by the Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council?

Nina: Yes, but unfortunately not quite as advanced as they are. We were ignored for a lot of years and now the Neighborhood Council is changing that. With the help of the Neighborhood Council we are getting the word out through the outreach efforts that we're doing. Since 1990, we have graduated almost 450 people out of our C.E.R.T. program.

Paul: C.E.R.T.? That is the Community Emergency Response Training program.

Nina: Yes, it was created and established by the world famous Los Angeles City Fire Department. Because Neighborhood Councils are constantly doing outreach, we can now put the word out about the C.E.R.T. trainings. We now probably have 100 to 125 people at our meetings on a monthly basis, we have our website, and we are going to start a newsletter. As a Neighborhood Council we found that one of our biggest problems all around has been communication. Because Sunland Tujunga is physically very isolated it makes it difficult for us to communicate with the City. We have also recognized that our community is not a business community.

Paul: Very good. Mike, I constantly hear that the need for blood donation is very high. Is this a high priority for the Red Cross after 9/11?

Mike: When you make a reference to 9/11 there was an initial push for blood, but it turned out that there wasn't a need. What 9/11 gave us was an overstock of blood. Currently, in the United States alone we are under stocked in supplies right now with blood. You will find that about 45% of those Americans in our nation are eligible to give blood. Out of that, 20% do give blood. These numbers put us at a disadvantage at this point. It is a really critical part, in terms of what we are doing. More than anything else, and that is something that Nina was saying, is preparedness. It is being proactive about your programs, not only in the community, but at home. It is something we work hand in hand with these other organizations to provide.

Paul: Education at any level, whether it is at school or whether it is beyond the foremost structure of academia, is an ongoing need. I would venture to say that most people do not know about Neighborhood Councils. I don't say it critically, but most of us go about our own lives and every once in a while we are reminded when there is heavy rain or a storm that there is this need of emergency preparedness.

Mike: Through the Red Cross we have such a plethora of activities that we are involved in. You touched on blood, which is a key and crucial part. Secondly, I think would be safety, aquatics, and first aid programs.

Paul: Aquatics?

Mike: The Red Cross actually teaches and trains the majority of Los Angeles County lifeguards. First aid and CPR are just some of the things that we teach them. Again it is about preparedness, it is about being proactive, and it is really empowering people to act. For the Red Cross, by offering these classes, we're just hitting the beginning. It's our first steps.

When one goes through the C.E.R.T. program, the Community Emergency Response Teams, will learn about something called Mass Care, which is taking care of large masses of people. They will learn about running shelter operations during an emergency. We feed, clothe, and bathe those people in the shelter. Those are really critical components of what every person can do, as far as their programs.

Nina: The Los Angeles Police Department also plays a big role, as well. They are the ones who teach us how to be safe, how to secure your belongings, and what to look for. Emergencies bring out the good and the bad in people. Let's face it. You find things disappearing and stores being looted. That is why the Neighborhood Council works with volunteers and the Police Department. The Police Department brings in the communication aspect of the whole thing. They have radio communication that we do not have, which makes response time a lot faster. That's why the Neighborhood Council has to work with them. The Red Cross is also a big part of it because they're the one's who teach first aid and CPR. They also know how to run things, like shelter operations.

Paul: Mike, does the Red Cross offer regularly scheduled classes? How does one take advantage of this opportunity for more education?

Mike: One important class that we've been speaking about today is the C.E.R.T. program, which we do offer. It has a long story behind it. It was started by the Los Angeles Fire Department in the late 1980s. They toured Japan and also went to earthquakes in Mexico to see how we can prepare the city for an emergency. The classes that you must attend to be certified are about 17.5 hours. It lasts seven weeks and you would contact your local Fire Department and disaster preparedness unit to do that. From there, there are three levels. If you just take the classes, you are in level one. To be in level two, you get introduced to the Red Cross and you take introduction to disaster and some other classes. It even goes as far as a level three, where those people work as MT Ones, where they can respond to emergencies and provide first aid.

Paul: While the C.E.R.T. program and the other structured plans are certainly important, what can people do right now to go out and better prepare themselves so that their household and their family is ready for an emergency?

Mick: Most importantly you want to build a disaster kit. What this is going to contain is your supplies, food, medications, and other storage items you know you might need. The two real critical items I would recommend to people is a battery-operated radio. If an emergency ever happens within Los Angeles what you are going to do is tune in to your radio station to the emergency broadcast and they will tell you exactly what it is you need to do within your community. Secondly is food and medication. You want to have 1 gallon of water per person per day. The last thing that you need to consider is medication, especially for the elder people in your family. You always want to have an extra supply of that.

Nina: I would also recommend old fashioned can openers for canned food. Another thing is bleach to purify your water.

Paul: How long should the duration of these kits be during an emergency? One, two, or three days?

Mick: The average is about three days. The mentality you want to take, especially in a large-scale disaster and this is why the C.E.R.T. teams began, is part of what we do in a large-scale like the Northridge Earthquake, is that you are going to have resources through your EMS System. In other words, your local neighborhoods are going to have to provide for themselves. This is why your Neighborhood Councils are important. They are critical when it comes to organizing a whole community. Supplies are also critical. You are looking in average three days.

If you have kids you might also want to look at baby food. If you have animals, especially in Los Angeles, where we love our animals, cat food and dog food are also needed. Let me remind everyone to please, check your supplies every six months. Things do expire.

Paul: How is the Neighborhood Council filtering this?

Nina: The Neighborhood Council is aware of its geographics. Three days for some places would probably be five where I live because it's a mountainous area where access is very limited.

Paul: Mike touched earlier about the C.E.R.T. Program, the Community Emergency Response Training, can you give us more information about the program?

Mike: Sure. It is offered through the Los Angeles City Fire Department. Recently, FEMA adopted the program. One interesting about the program is that, as we all know, money is scarce, and sometimes the Fire Dept. is scrapping for resources. I know that each of the Neighborhood Councils get \$50,000 from the City and this is something that you as a viewer could approach your Neighborhood Council and ask them to assist.

The program is being used, not only by the City, but you'll see that as you travel other C.E.R.T. teams are sprouting. Again, you go through 17.5 hours of training. It is community basic level training. The things that you might cover are basic search and rescue techniques, fire prevention, and triage. Ultimately, you are learning to work as a team, which is always very critical.

Paul: Is the C.E.R.T. program available for businesses?

Nina: Yes. Companies can also be included with C.E.R.T.

Paul: Mike you also pointed out that there is no fee for retail businesses, right?

Mike: Several large-scale businesses throughout Los Angeles have a relationship with the Red Cross. They have their employees trained. As a matter of fact, City Hall has a continuity of people that are C.E.R.T. trained. It is totally free. It is just a matter of working it out with the Fire Department. As you can imagine, there is a huge demand for this program, so it's just a matter of being pro-active.

Paul: It's that time again, time to pay that bill. I certainly want to thank our two guests, Nina Royal from Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council and Mike Fenton from the American Red Cross. If you have any questions you would like to see covered in future shows, you can e-mail your comments to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment at www.lacityneighborhoods.com or you can phone 866-LAHELPS, that's toll free. To learn more about the Red Cross log onto www.acrossla.org or call (800) 627-7000. To learn more about the CERT program log on to www.CERT/la.com. From everyone here at the Neighborhood Café, I'm Paul Napier.