

Emergency Preparedness, Part I

In-studio guest(s): Carol Parks, Emergency Preparedness Department
Horace Penman, President, Community and Neighbors for the Ninth District Unity (CANNDU)
Insert Video Clip guest: Grace Bradbury, Harbor Gateway South Neighborhood Council
Host: Bob Jimenez

Bob: Welcome to the Neighborhood Café, a new place in town where we can get some coffee and a snack, and visit with some very nice people. Today we are going to talk about a serious subject and we are going to do it in sort of an informal fashion. I'm going to employ what we often do at the University of California with the journalism students. We tell them to get naked, just metaphorically, and then we try to get the students to kind of loosen up and find themselves, and get to the problem solving area of reporting. We are going to kind of have the city "get naked" and reveal some very important things about Neighborhood Councils. What are Neighborhood Councils? They are a very important new concept, and an exciting new tool to improve the quality of life in your neighborhood, and of course we are going to learn some valuable information of how City Hall services work for you. Please grab a snack and a cup of coffee, and join us for a little public policy for enterprise discussion on how our city works and how people can be a bigger voice and make your city a government more accountable.

The question is, are you prepared for a disaster? Knowing we live in earthquake country, and now is the time to be prepared. What do you need to know? What rules should your Neighborhood Councils play? What should you do as an individual once a disaster strikes? Joining us today are two important guests. We have Carol Parks an Emergency Preparedness Coordinator from the Emergency Preparedness Department, and also an old Marine. He's a tough guy, and he gets things done! His name is Horace Penman and he is from CANNDU that's an acronym for a Neighborhood Council, right?

Horace: Yes, that is Community and Neighbors for the Ninth District Unity Neighborhood Council.

Bob: Carol, what is the City of Los Angeles is doing to train individuals, as well as Neighborhood Councils to be ready for the next fire, flood, earthquake, plane crash, or even maybe a terrorist attack?

Carol: The City of L.A. has a very aggressive emergency preparedness program. We have our own Emergency Preparedness Department and we work with every city department, agency and commission and we get the word out that emergency preparedness is very important and it is critical that every individual, every family, and neighborhood be prepared for the next disaster. We never know when a disaster will strike, so we encourage education in all types of hazards, whether they are natural or man made. We encourage families to get out and learn how to be prepared and we basically provide information and training courses. We work very closely with Neighborhood Councils by doing presentations in their community fairs.

Bob: What do you teach them?

Carol: We teach them to have a disaster plan. Every family and every household should have an emergency plan of what they will do once a disaster occurs. It could be basically having a plan of action of where will they relocate following a disaster, having an emergency contact number of someone out of the area, that every household member can call to let them know that they are ok. We also encourage families to have enough food and water for at least 72 hours because the government may not be able to get to you, although we will be allowed to come and assist you nearly following a disaster. Another important thing is to have emergency preparedness kits.

Bob: As we know from the Northridge earthquake, and fires, floods and other disasters that hit the Los Angeles region in the 1990's that we need to be prepared. What do you do with all the information and or disasters that have occurred?

Horace: What I do in my community is try to encourage them to join in with a single premise, which is, "The life you save may be your own, and when you finish saving yours, help your neighbor because it is going to take a unified effort to recover ourselves."

Bob: Neighborhoods have become very important because that is when you start acting as a "group." You work in cohesion and you learn from one another.

Horace: Look at the resources the city is putting in. There is 1500 people per one fireman, 1000 to one policeman, so in a major disaster like an earthquake, the Fire Department is going to respond to the area that needs them the most, which will be to the schools because children are there.

Bob: What specifically do you do? Do you set aside a place where everybody would go? Do you prepare them with certain numbers where they call? Do you take care of the family first? These are questions everyone needs to ask themselves.

The number one thing that I always hear is go get the training. We have in our community around 1000 trained people within the last two or three years, but we need more. We need help with things like that. I heard that our City Council Member, Jan Perry, in the downtown area, has trainings on an ongoing basis. What do those trainings do?

Horace: She has offered radio equipment like the CT radios and also the emergency kits called Empacks. Depending on how many groups they train then that's how many packs they provide. They also have different levels of training. In addition they are also very well coordinated with the Fire Department. Especially, with Chief Bixel who is the Chief in my area. It's important to know these people that will help during a disaster.

Bob: We are going to take some time out and come back with more information on the nuts and bolts of CERT training and how you can actually apply it. Right now, however, we are going to take a look at Grace Bradbury's home that is prepared for a disaster. Grace Bradbury is from the Harbor Gateway South Neighborhood Council. This is a woman, ladies and gentlemen, in a wheelchair, but that did not stop her from taking action to be prepared.

<<Start video clip>>

Grace: I am Grace Bradbury with CERT and I was trained at Kaiser Hospital. I value every minute of the training we had because it really awakened me to think what you could do to protect yourself. I have everything here in the back porch. In my closet I have extra batteries,

flashlights, keys to the fuse box, and things that are handy during a disaster. These glass ornaments here are treasures to me because they were given to me by the Harbor Division LAPD. I consider them very important, but during an earthquake most likely they would break. What I've done is anchored them with an earthquake pole, so they won't break. This is my water that I could use anytime. I also have canned fruit in the other parts of the garage. I also have different emergency supplies and different bandages. This one in particular is the butterfly closure bandage. It is important to keep ample supply of different types because you never know what type of cut or damage will occur. I also have sturdy gloves, tongue depressors, and pampers because they are used for applying pressure if there is bleeding. This is my sweet little AM/FM radio and here I have extra batteries. Here I have cups and plastic bags. These are all things that you will need that the Fire Department here in San Pedro will help you get.

In addition, the Fire Department also helps you with training. They help you with the CERT training. That's the acronym for Community Emergency Response Team. Every Neighborhood Council should have someone that will go through the training. It is available at your local fire station and the American Red Cross can also direct you to where to get trained.

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Bob: This is reminiscent of a nuclear shelter in the 1950's. Do you remember when everybody dug holes and put canned food in there? People were actually getting ready for the worst. That situation has not changed because we still have earthquakes. We're still not able to predict them. We're having civil unrests that are a type of disaster, and of course we have that lingering terrorism threat. Why do you think that people aren't taking the time to help one another?

Horace: I think it's because we don't have adverse weather conditions. Those people in hurricane alley, tornado alley, or what have you are very well prepared because they know it's coming every season. In Los Angeles we occasionally have an earthquake.

Bob: Talk to me a little bit about the opportunity to prepare for some of the disasters that we've been discussing through your Neighborhood Council? How could the Neighborhood Council help?

Carol: Let me point out that it's been ten years since the Northridge earthquake, so we have a lot of people that have not suffered the effects of an earthquake such as that one. It takes effort to prepare for disaster, but a lot of times people don't want to take a few hours out of their busy schedules to make sure they are prepared and their families are prepared.

Bob: Carol, you brought along a survival kit, so what do you do with these things? Explain it to us.

Carol: This is a very user friendly survival kit. Some items you need are, for example, a flashlight and a whistle. A whistle is important just in case you want someone to know where you are. Water is very important to have water and food for up to three days. You don't need a food bar, you just need the essentials.

Carol: A checklist is important because it will help you remember what you have to do in case of disaster. It is very important to have those emergency numbers in here, so that any family member can refer to that. Also, we have a thermal emergency blanket.

Bob: Where and who gets these kits?

Carol: Anyone who attends our emergency preparedness fair.

Bob: How is the Emergency Preparedness Department trained?

Horace: I wish I had available in our neighborhood and for our CERT teams, these things. One important thing to note, however, is that our schools are prepared. More of the schools in our area have this type of food storage, these blankets, and whistles. Our kits don't come with them, but most our schools have them in our emergency preparedness kits.

Bob: Horace is well prepared because you came to the Café today with this hard hat. Do you walk around with this all the time?

Horace: Not all the time. In my area in case of an accidental fire, I put this vest on and the helmet. I am prepared to do whatever the chief asks us to in our community.

Bob: Emergency preparedness is very important in Los Angeles.

Horace: We we're discussing the Northridge Earthquake a little bit earlier. Recently I saw on television the power outages in New York and saw that people were walking to the subway. If that happened in Los Angeles, we need to consider that in Los Angeles people drive and during a disaster, infrastructure probably wouldn't be at its best.

Bob: You don't get the real story, even out of the news reports. You never hear them say "we retrofitted this overpass." I wish we had a better mass transit system, but right now we are a car society. What's the best advice?

Horace: It definitely depends on where you are.

Bob: We got a little sidetracked. What could Neighborhood Councils do? How are they valuable? Are people ready in your neighborhood?

Horace: No, they are not, not as ready as they should be.

Bob: You are working on that, right?

Horace: The Neighborhood Council is working very hard at getting the word out by doing grass-roots outreach. We talk to people constantly. We talk to senior citizens and ask them questions that they could ponder. Will you be able to get out of your house? Will water be handy for you?

Bob: Why is it difficult for people to listen? It goes back to this apathy thing, right?

Horace: People always think that things will never happen to them.

Carol: Exactly.

Horace: Programs like these help us get away from that notion.

Bob: This is not an individual survival thing, which it can be. The whole emergency preparedness thing just works better when you talk about it as a neighborhood.

Horace: I think Carol brought up a very important point. If you have family outside of town that everybody can call to in another state is a good suggestion. Everyone seems to be going cell phone crazy now-a-days and they probably won't work during a disaster. All you have to do is call them and tell them that you're okay.

Bob: On a personal level, what have you done to be prepared?

Carol: I have to make sure I share my personal plan of preparedness with my neighbors and that a main reason why we're here today; to spread the word about getting prepared. I encourage everyone to get to meet your neighbors. Let them know if you have elderly people in your family, small children, and even pets.

Horace: I meet everybody that is concerned, which is everyone in my community. I would like to see us organized the way we were in WWII. I am sure you are too young to remember this, but I would like to see the black captains being trained for CERT. I would like to see one CERT member on each of all the Neighborhood Councils. They are going to be the one's that carry the community.

Bob: We're just running out of time. For the CERT website visit, CERT-LA.com.

I want to thank Carol Parks very much with the Emergency Preparedness Department. Thank you for showing us your kit, which by the way, is only a starter kit. There's a lot more that you can add. Also, thanks to Horace Penman, from CANDUU. You can contact the Emergency Preparedness Department by calling (213) 978-2222 or visit their website at www.lacity.org/epd and if you have any questions or topics that you would like to see covered at the Neighborhood Café, you can e-mail them to the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment or call (866) LA HELPS or (866) 524 3577. For information on any city services, you simply call 3-1-1, your one call to City Hall, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For everyone here at the Neighborhood Café, I'm Bob Jimenez, thanks for watching.