

## **Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team Meeting of 13 September**

The meeting began with an introduction of the evening's speaker, Karen Wright of the Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission, introduced by Catherine Matthews, Director of the Upcounty Regional Service Center. Ms. Wright had been asked to address the Damascus community concerns regarding the mechanics of how the Damascus water was supplied to the city tank and how vulnerable water flow might be in the event of a power grid failure.

The Damascus water tank has a capacity of 1 million gallons and is monitored 24/7 from a control center that, among other things, does on-line chlorine testing. It was interesting to learn that the pump that fills the Damascus tank is not located here but at the facility at Cedar Heights, the next storage facility "downstream" from which Damascus water is pumped. That facility contains 2 ½ million gallons and has a back-up generator for emergency power and pumping. Both facilities are visited once a week for maintenance. The tank is only allowed to drain 1/3 empty as a fire reserve is maintained. Current usage requires the pumps to run only 6 hours in the winter and 12 hours in the summer. In an emergency where the power grid goes down, gravity should supply flowing water for the Damascus community for at least 72 hours... barring some exceptional contingency such as fire.

The minutes of the last meeting were changed at the request of the Communications Committee Chair to correct the impression that cooperation existed with all ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Services), when instead it should indicate that cooperation exists with ARES in all surrounding counties but not yet with Montgomery County. The DEPT Chair reported that although he had been tasked at the last meeting to contact Catherine Matthews for help on this problem, he had failed to provide all necessary information in the first request for help, but that this had been corrected and a report should be available at the next meeting.

A Damascus Fair & Health and Safety Day report was given by Doug Noble, who thanked the relevant volunteers for manning the DEPT booth from Friday night until Sunday afternoon. Many new people filled out the DEPT volunteer application forms. The Communications Committee had constructed a big display on community emergency radio networks, including a TV program of Walter Cronkite explaining how various organizations supplied emergency radio communications. A 72-hour kit was laid out for explanation and CERT information was explained and handed out. For the Health and Safety day portion of the Fair DEPT had reserved a booth for the American Red Cross, and this booth was manned by Red Cross volunteers Saturday morning and their emergency preparedness literature was left for DEPT to hand out for the remainder of the Fair.

Participation at the Fair and signage was funded by personal contributions from members of the Damascus Rotary Club, and Dovetail Publishing contributed materials.

An Environmental Committee report was given by Joe Corey, explaining the different categories of hazardous materials and how various governmental organizations handled them. There are no large toxic or hazardous waste storage facilities in our community to be concerned about.

A Red Cross meeting report was given regarding the 1 September meeting with the Chris Paladino, Director of the Montgomery County Red Cross, and the Matt Swinburn, Director of the Upcounty Red Cross office in Gaithersburg. The Good Heart Program was discussed along with other forms of cooperation and training, but the meeting was inconclusive as their energies and time were focused on the hurricane disaster relief operations. Mr. Swinburn promised to respond with a proposal for cooperation as soon as possible.

Chair reported that contact had also been established with the Salvation Army, who was eager to learn of the Good Heart Program developed by DEPT and asked for copies to be made available for evaluation by both the regional and national offices.

Chair reported upon a meeting of Methodist ministers at which the Good Heart Program was presented and discussed. The response was of unanimous acceptance, and plans for promoting the Good Heart Program included working to call a meeting of all Damascus area clergy to discuss involvement and implementation.

Rita Noble of the Food Committee reported on a Damascus Help board meeting where the offer by the Damascus Lions Club to provide a back-up generator for their food storage facility was discussed. This was inconclusive as questions were raised about a larger involvement with DEPT and the role of Damascus Help in the community during a disaster emergency. Subsequent meetings of the board will take place for more discussion before any decisions will be taken.

Paul Laing, who serves as Damascus representative to the Montgomery County 5<sup>th</sup> Precinct Citizen's Advisory Board and had been asked at the last meeting to take questions to that body, reported regarding:

- Why there was no traffic direction certification for CERT members... that Capt. Cahalen would look into this more deeply;
- Whether or not there was a Police Auxiliary in Montgomery County... there is not;
- How to establish liaison with the organization of retired police officers active in the Damascus community... Capt. Cahalen would expedite that by connecting him to the members of the group.

There was discussion regarding the many police families living in the Damascus area and how to best support those families during an emergency when the officers might be on duty away from home for extended periods of time. This was one reason to contact and

involve the retired officers group, but it was pointed out that under the Good Heart Program, in which community churches take responsibility for the geographical neighborhoods in which they are situated, there would be a local church that would want to know who that family was... surely a comfort to both the family and the absent officer.

Tim Hyatt was again mentioned in the dispatches and thanked for making his **Town of Damascus** website available to DEPT. Previous meeting reports of DEPT are archived at and can be found at [www.mindspring.com/~thyatt/damascus/](http://www.mindspring.com/~thyatt/damascus/) and this provides a community history of how DEPT evolved to this point and what we have learned.

Chair reported that everyone who had volunteered to take CERT training had not responded to a confirmation request for the dates scheduled by Bill Delaney... but that another request for participation would be sent out... especially as the DEPT volunteer base has doubled since the first request for interest. There had been some difficulty finding a meeting place for all dates, but although this had been accomplished using three different places, confidence was high that by the time of the training one place could be found for the six class nights. Catherine Matthews offered to see if a local school classroom could be made available.

Chair reported that he will speak to a combined assemblage of the Damascus American Legion and the Legion Ladies Auxiliary on Oct 11 regarding DEPT and the Good Heart Program.

It was reported that Ted Jurghans would be speaking to the local Boy Scout council about developing a program where local scouts could work on three merit badges associated with community emergency preparedness in cooperation with DEPT. Frederick County has recently had such a program that culminated in a simulated disaster exercise in which scouts were trained for communications with FRS radios.

Chair reported that although he had been directed at the last meeting to contact Emmittsburg FEMA training center to inquire about trainings that might be made available to communities like Damascus, this had not yet been done.

**The next meeting will be held at the Damascus library on Monday, 20 September, at 7:30.**