

Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team Meeting of 20 September

There were three changes to the minutes of the last meeting. First, they were changed at the request of the Communications Committee Chair to correct the Communications Committee report to read:

The Communications Committee had constructed a display on Amateur Radio, the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, and the establishment of a community emergency radio network, Also shown was a DVD from the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) narrated by amateur radio operator Walter Cronkite, which explained how volunteer HAM radio operators supplied emergency radio communications during many types of emergencies for citizens and various public safety organizations.

Secondly, in the water tower report the word “downstream” is changed to “upstream.”

Thirdly, at the last meeting the DEPT Chair, responding to a request for clarification of how DEPT fitted into the overall scheme of things, stated to the attending County official that should anything happen “We all go to work for that man,” indicating Darren Long, Chief of the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department, “as he will be the senior officer on the field.” Chair requested a consensus affirmation of the meeting assembled before this was retroactively entered into the minutes, and this was given.

John Miller distributed CD copies of the Montgomery County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). These can now be made available to anyone who would like one. George Moy suggested that each committee review the appropriate section of the EOP for questions and comment. Should there be any significant questions, an appropriate and knowledgeable county employee should be invited to speak to DEPT to address any concerns and explain how we fit in.

Rev. Walt Edmonds of the Damascus United Methodist Church has called a meeting for all Damascus area clergy for next Wednesday to discuss the Good Heart Program.

Contact has been made with Sandy Ferguson of the Baltimore Washington Methodist Conference to discuss how interfaith organizations might offer help and advice regarding the Good Heart Program. She has offered to help establish DEPT liaison with Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD).

Catherine Matthews has still not responded to the DEPT request for help in establishing liaison with Montgomery County ARES and RACES regarding emergency radio communications.

Mr. Swinburn of the Gaithersburg Red Cross office has still not responded with the promised proposal for cooperation, but this is understandable considering the preoccupation of emergency services organizations with the hurricane relief work.

Marlene Lee reports via e-mail many examples of FEMA and other agency grant funding being made available for communities active in emergency preparedness, and urged DEPT to investigate these possibilities more actively.

Another e-mail request for CERT training volunteers will be sent as soon as we can confirm the location of one training site for all 6 Damascus classes. The volunteer base of DEPT has almost doubled since the first announcement, and another call will surely bring a response.

Chief Long reported that it has been made clear to the Fire Department and the Office of Emergency Management that DEPT would be allowed to establish whatever community communications network hub it might wish in the fire station, as the station and radio tower assembly next door is wholly owned by the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department.

Doug Noble reports that during the tornado outbreak this preceding week the Frederick Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated and therefore there was much coordinated amateur radio traffic in Frederick County describing blow by blow where the threat was. However, there was no such activity in Montgomery County on Montgomery County frequencies.

Paul Laing raised the question about how, in such an emergency, the community would be alerted and DEPT activated. Chief Long gave a brief report on the dismantling of the old civil defense network of sirens. There are still sirens at the voluntary fire departments of Damascus, Laytonsville, Hyattstown, and Green Valley. Discussion ensued regarding taking on a siren project to inspect and test the siren at the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department, which has not been sounded for over two years. Attendees remembered growing up in the Midwest where sirens were commonplace and had different sounding modes so that, for instance, a community would know that the specific danger might be a tornado. The Gazette might be utilized to educate folks in Damascus about the siren alert possibilities and informed about a scheduled test. Among other things, the test would determine the effective range of the siren in Damascus. This might be done in conjunction with some other emergency preparedness community activity and would of course be coordinated with the police department. An attempt will be made to find out about when fire prevention week is. Chief Long expressed that the need is there and that it would be good to have a siren protocol.

The Communications Committee requested that a poll of DEPT volunteers be taken to ascertain who might have a FRS, GMRS, MURS, or CB radio that might be utilized by the Committee.

The next meeting of DEPT will be held at the Damascus Volunteer Fire Station on Tuesday, September 28, at 7:30 PM.

