

Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team Meeting of 2 August

As the meeting came to order the conversation was about the proper legal entity the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team (DEPT) should be, and thus the conversation continued on to the pros and cons as to whether or not it should be affiliated with the Damascus Citizens Alliance or separate. Because several voices for a separate and stand-alone entity were absent, the decision was tabled for the next meeting.

Communications and e-mail from absent team members were read. Ty Stottlemyer will be out of town but will try to ensure Fire Department representation at the Monday meetings. Sherrie Wade wrote that St. Paul's Parish "is committed to be a place for people of the community as well as people from our church to come in an emergency. I have also been able to identify the elderly of our parish. This week in our bulletin I will ask for parishioners who are wheelchair bound or have any other disability to let me know to add to my list of vulnerable people in our parish." Catherine Matthews of the Upcounty Regional Services Center has asked us to submit any questions we think the County might be able to help us with. Accordingly, DEPT has already requested legal guidance as to how different lists identifying at risk folks in the community (such as from Meals on Wheels, Damascus Help, the Senior Center, and Sherrie's list) might be combined into one Damascus list for us without running afoul of the privacy laws.

Committee reports were given. The Communications Committee gave another report too lengthy and thorough to include here, but it is clear that Doug Noble has laid extensive groundwork for the establishment of a Damascus community emergency communications radio network. Local radio enthusiasts have been contacted, emergency volunteer radio organizations have been talked to, similar efforts in other counties have been researched and interviewed, technical issues have been resolved, access to repeater facilities for our network have been arranged... and therefore the process to establish such a community radio net is well along.

The Church Committee, in the person of Terry Reister, Pastor of the Hyattstown Christian Church, circulated the draft of a letter he will send to all area churches requesting that they become involved in the emergency preparedness effort and send representatives to the DEPT meetings. It is hoped that churches will take on some responsibility for their neighborhoods, will become equipped with the necessary radios to plug into the Damascus radio network connected to the Damascus fire station, perhaps stockpile food and blankets, and in short... do more of the things they are already doing so well but as part of an integrated Damascus effort.

A presentation was made by Skip Lanham of the Shelter Committee. The County has a well thought out plan to use high schools as shelters in times of disaster or emergency because they have kitchens, bathrooms, showers, and back-up generators. The Corps of Engineers is now undertaking a survey of these Montgomery County facilities to assess their capabilities as shelters and this survey will reveal the details we are interested in.

For instance, is a back-up generator just for safety and security (lights) or are they big enough to provide for kitchen use and heat in the winter? Further, although the County is prepared to disburse resources such as food and blankets from centrally located stockpiles, what is the on-site resource level for each potential shelter in the event that an ice storm event prevents or impedes the timely transportation of necessary resources to shelters... or the timely dispatch of shelter staff who might be prevented from reaching their assigned shelter. How can the local community support and help the shelter effort? By providing local staff as back up... perhaps in the form of County affiliated volunteers already trained in shelter duties? By providing food stocks... as from Damascus Help, local churches, or pre-arranged protocols with community grocery stores? Further, it was unclear if the County has the stockpiled resources to open all 24 potential shelters at the same time... not good if there is an area wide blizzard or ice storm that disrupts power and travel for several days and all shelters are needed to provide food and warmth.

Regarding the CERT training... Chair reports no word yet from Bill Delaney regarding possible training dates. There appears to be no problem with training sites in Damascus. After consulting with Mike Burch of the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department, their facilities seem to be available for any date the Damascus library cannot accommodate. And again, Doug Noble, currently taking the training, was present to regale us with stories from the class-that-goes-before.

Discussion followed regarding the committees and whether or not we had the correct ones, if there were other questions we should be asking that required additional ones, and how we could get everyone who has declared an interest in DEPT to join one. For instance, there seemed to be a consensus that once past the nitty gritty of organizational details, the real work would be done at the committee level. Committees could start having their own meetings and thus DEPT might not have to meet every week. John Miller suggested that the Electrical and Water committees be combined into a Utilities Committee... an idea so self evident that it was adopted without comment.

Environmental health and safety is mentioned in the County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the question was raised as to whether or not DEPT should find a community volunteer knowledgeable in these matters to think about whether or not this is a committee category we should be concerned about and what questions should be asked. Joe Corey was tasked to take this on.

It was suggested that we needed a Transportation and Logistics Committee... for instance, to coordinate 4-wheel drive volunteers and motor-homes-with-generators volunteers and the many other things we have not yet thought of. John Miller volunteered to head this effort. His already assumed effort of assessing the preparedness and needs of community day care centers will be incorporated into this.

The committee structure at present is:

- Communications Network
 - Utilities
- Doug Noble
George Moy

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| • Public Relations and Community Information | Fred Schroeder |
| • Medical | Phyllis Taliaferro |
| • Food | Rita Noble |
| • Church | Terry Reister |
| • Transportation and Logistics | John Miller |
| • Environmental Health and Safety | Joe Corey |
| • Shelter | Skip Lanham |

Discussion followed regarding the setting of priorities... near term as in what specifically can be done before the election... and far term as in ultimate goals and objectives. Near term priorities were set, and they are:

- **Home Preparedness Education**... our first priority... how to better educate and enable the citizens of our community to take care of their families and homes in a disaster or emergency;
- **Damascus Water Tower back-up generator**... is it needed... is it possible... is it affordable;
- **Damascus Emergency Radio Network**... remembering that the decision was taken to embrace the entire Damascus Volunteer Fire Department District as our area of responsibility... how to provide and ensure operational communications between the fire station and outlying neighborhoods and churches in the event of an electrical failure affecting both the utilities and telephone grids;
- **Damascus Help back-up generator**... we have a food stockpile in our community... but the refrigerated portion is at risk in a power grid failure;
- **Damascus Health and Safety Day**... how to bring our efforts to the attention of the larger community... and especially... how to best utilize the event to advance the above 4 objectives.

During the meeting a flyer from the 17 July Community Emergency Preparedness Fair for the towns of Hamilton and Purcellville was passed around. It was inspirational to see what another community is doing and a little comforting to see we are not alone in our efforts. It presents great possibilities in how to use a community fair to good purpose, and is viewable at:

<http://www.purcellvilleva.com/calendar/CommEmergPrepFair.htm>