

Report of May 17, 2004

This letter to Luis Martinez of the Upcounty Regional Services Center is the first action report that will lead to the establishment of the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team:

Luis,

At last Thursday's meeting I promised to keep you and Cathy posted on our attempt to implement some sort of emergency preparedness protocol for the city of Damascus.

This attempt has been spearheaded by the Damascus Rotary and embraced by the Damascus Alliance. Other community leaders have now been brought on board, and I believe you heard the impressive presentation made on our efforts by Randy Scritchfield of the Damascus Alliance to the semi-annual meeting of the Damascus School Community Action Team. That meeting was well attended by community leaders and the idea is now running loose.

The plan now being considered is to attempt to use the community event of Damascus Days, beginning on 9 July, to recruit from the citizens of Damascus both a group to be trained under the CHAMPS program and a group to be trained as a Emergency Action Team (EAT)... able to set up and implement an Emergency Mobilization Center. It is understood that these teams would be at the disposal of the greater need of Montgomery County.

Further... the goal is to attempt to present the training during the 8 weeks preceding the Damascus Fair during September... such that some sort of exercise involving the attending citizenry can be implemented during that event.

As to the first event... the Rotary and the Alliance would set up a booth to: 1) distribute emergency preparedness literature, 2) allow attendees to speak to County officials who would be present to answer questions and discuss emergency preparedness, 3) advertise a community meeting to be held in conjunction with County officials to be briefed on the training and sign people up for it, 4) sign up folks for volunteer community participation using the EAT volunteer sign up forms, and 5) use the booth for any other good idea not yet thought of.

As to the second event... Bernie Moxley of the Damascus Legion has been consulted and has suggested that part of the Legion facility where the Damascus Fair will be held can be set aside with the thought of having an exercise to set up either an Emergency Volunteer Mobilization Center or having some other exercise the County professionals might suggest.

Originally we had approached the County with a view to obtaining assume sort of emergency preparedness template we could bring back to the community. Now we are ready to help write one.

Last week Jim Resnick suggested that County resources could be made available, and during that conversation I indicated that I felt no more planning could go forward until the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department was consulted and brought on board. I have now talked to Captain Ty Stottlemeyer and they welcome the plan and see no impediment.

As to the first action step... Peggy Stone has suggested that an initial meeting of community leaders could be quickly convened by the Damascus Citizens Alliance at which County officials (Jim Resnick, Ann Evans, Bill Delaney, et al) could brief us on what is possible and what County resources could be brought to bear... and then we could game plan what is practical in advance of the 9 July date. Peggy Stone thinks we might also recruit trainees from this cadre of community leaders... but in any event the Rotary, Legion, Alliance, and Lions have all agreed to make members available for training.

At present... Ann Evans and Jim Resnick are to communicate with each other to come up with a departmentally unified approach to our request, and as soon as we hear from them that it is clear to move forward... we are ready to move quickly.

The scenario Randy Scritchfield spoke about at the meeting last week has now received considerable community play on e-mail, and I include it here as reference to where the community thinking has progressed:

The tentative scenarios we discussed were based not upon an emergency directly affecting our community... but the impact on our community should Washington DC implement an evacuation plan... or some event causing DC citizens to react as though they must flee.

In scenario one... the a priori assumption is that Hwy 27 becomes a parking lot... the community is over-run with stranded and non-mobile strangers... and that at some point they will have needs of water, food, shelter, medicine, lawful protection, and a place to use the bathroom.

In scenario two... all of the above is in play... but there really is an event that causes the electrical grid to go down... with all that implies.

In scenario three... all of the above is in play... but it happens in freezing winter conditions and time and warmth become critical.

Who will enforce order... who has the keys to the recreation center... will the water still flow when the grid is down... where are the porta-potties... who is in charge of communications and community information... how will folks be fed... and on and on.

Luis... this is the situation at present... I will keep you posted,

Doc Taliaferro