

## **Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team Meeting of 19 July**

The meeting was moderated by Randy Scritchfield, Chairperson of the Damascus Citizen's Alliance (DCA), who reported that the DCA leadership had met and agreed that the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team (DEPT) could be constituted as an official committee of the DCA and thus receive the legal, organizational, and liability benefits of a legal not-for-profit entity. Discussion of a mission statement ensued, and a draft was agreed upon that will be marked up and presented top the next meeting.

A report on the recruitment effort for the CERT training was presented, several present added their names, and a preliminary count of 22 was given. All present were asked to stand as their names were called so the crowd would know their faces. Fred Schroeder, the only DEPT member who has received the CERT training, gave a presentation on basics and what to expect. As it was noted that as a CERT class would begin the next night on a Tue/Thu schedule, it was agreed that our CERT trainees would accept a Mon/Wed schedule if it would facilitate an earlier class date. CERT Program Director Bill Delaney is now looking into trainer and venue availability and timing.

Reports were received. Chief Long reported for the Water Committee that WSSC had been contacted and would send appropriate experts, but that a date was not determined pending DEPT gaining access to the County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to view the utilities annex so as to prepare a complete list of competent questions. It was pointed out that Damascus had once depended upon town wells for its water, and it was resolved to investigate the status of these wells and whether or not they might be suitable and useable as a back-up water supply.

George Moy reported that the Electric Power Committee had contacted Allegheny Power, who had also agreed to send experts to consult with us upon receipt of a properly formal invitation, but this also awaits access to the EOP. Chief Long reported that FEMA inspectors had recently visited the Damascus firehouse to inspect the back-up power system. The firehouse has fuel tanks for the generators and under a disaster situation some of that fuel could be made available to other community generators identified as important to the community. The County Depot also has a back-up generator and fuel tank. Doug Noble volunteered his mobile home, pointing out that mobile homes with long extension cords could be used as portable generators able to respond to locations in need should the power grid go down, such as a home where it might be necessary to power a medical appliance. It was proposed to identify and enlist mobile home owners in the community who might be willing to sign on to a program to put their "generators on wheels" at the disposal of the community under emergency disaster situations. The question was raised whether or not schools, likely to be mobilized as shelters, had back-up power, but no one was sure.

A combined report was given for the Medical and Food Resource Committees. During the preceding week the 4 pharmacies and 2 grocery stores in the community were contacted and the pharmacists and store managers interviewed. It was learned that:

- 1) Only the grocery stores have back-up power capability, but this is only for refrigeration of food and does not extend to the pharmacies within or any registers necessary to sell and disburse food and medicines,
- 2) However, pharmacist Allen Horowitz at Safeway points out that in a declared emergency his license allows him to disburse from the trunk of his car if necessary,
- 3) But, no store managers with keys live in the immediate Damascus area,
- 4) The stores and management seem to have no thought out emergency disaster plan, but point out that they have been able to respond to community needs in past storms and power outages, and
- 5) The state has an emergency response plan for pharmacists, and Cindy Feinberg of RiteAid has taken the training and keeps a packed bag in her closet in case she is mobilized to report to an emergency medical distribution area, but in our case the closest such depot is likely to be Frederick.

As much emergency/disaster contingency planning involves situations in which the power grid is down, there was much discussion about how to organize churches, home owners associations, and other such entities into a communications network that would tie the community together and allow for reporting to and response from the Damascus fire station should the telephone and cellular systems become inoperable. Doug Noble is an expert in such matters, spoke about existing ham and radio organizations already existent for emergency mobilization, and was prevailed upon to serve as chair of a Communications Committee that would investigate how best to implement an emergency radio communications net for our community. Doug has reported subsequently that the County is trying to get a grant for radios for CERT members, and has suggested that at the bare minimum we should establish a telephone tree for DEPT.

During the discussion of establishing community self-sufficiency for 72 hours, Rita Noble, Director of Damascus Help, suggested that her organization had food stocks that might be sufficient during certain times of the year only. However, Damascus Help has no back-up generator, and the consensus seemed to be that this was a worthy goal for the group. Rita was prevailed upon to volunteer to chair the Food Resource Committee.

Questions were raised regarding our responsibility of geographical coverage. It was decided that this should conform to the fire district covered by the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department, and that Hyattstown and Clarksburg would therefore be included in our contingency planning. An attempt will be made to bring the Clarksburg leadership to our meetings.

Community outreach and education was deemed important, and there was discussion as to how the Gazette might best be involved, perhaps by asking for a dedicated small space to be utilized to keep Damascus residents informed as to our efforts on a regular basis. Also, it was suggested that a web site be utilized for committees to post the results of

their research and for DEPT generally to use for archival and communications purposes. Fred Schroeder will look in to contacting the web master of a current Damascus oriented site to discuss possible cooperation. Several volunteered to contact their churches about being involved and Hyattstown pastor W. F. Terry Reister offered to send a letter to area churches asking for their involvement in our efforts.

There seemed to be sense of motivation and urgency to do as much as possible in advance of the November elections, and, accordingly, it was resolved that the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team would meet every Monday night at the Damascus Library at 7:30 PM.