

This article is part of a packet of information on evacuation preparedness made available to Applegate residents by Applegate Valley Fire District #9 and Sandy Shaffer.

Hints for Developing Neighborhood Groups

The Why

Thank you for requesting this informational packet. Our goals are two-fold:

- ▶ to help private residents be better prepared to personally deal with natural disasters, and,
- ▶ to strengthen neighborhood or community communications by pooling resources, so that every household is then better prepared to cope with disasters.

Federal research on the loss of civilian lives during wildfires (the most common natural disaster we probably face here in the Applegate) shows time and again that:

- ! Behavior dramatically influences survival of life and property during a wildfire.
- ! Pre-planning for a disaster helps to minimize panic.
- ! Lack of pre-planning and education on fire behavior complicates an evacuation.

It is nationally acknowledged that private citizens need to be prepared to survive on their own for up to 72 hours during a disaster. (That's not to say help may not arrive sooner, but if a disaster is widespread it may take that long for sufficient resources to arrive in your immediate area.) Emergency kits should be prepared, evacuation plans outlined, communication systems set up, alternate methods of power and water secured, first aid learned.

A daunting task, but one that could become easier by working with a neighbor to prepare together. Who knows, your shortcoming may be your neighbor's strong suit and vice versa. Consider the possible resources and strengths to be discovered if a group of say 10 neighbors were to pool their talents! But also consider that good neighborhood communications might possibly save someone's life during a disaster, whether it be the elderly gentleman living by himself, or your own daughter.

This is not something that a county government or a local fire district can do for you. This is something that you need to discuss with your family, and with your neighbors. We can give you resources, but you need to start talking now.

Getting Started

The information in this "kit" addresses personal evacuation planning, 72-hour supply lists, resident resource forms, telephone/communication graphics, how to prepare your home before an evacuation, local fire district-level evacuation plans, county resources and programs, and where to get additional information. Unfortunately, we cannot print multiple copies of all of this information, so most of you will receive this via e-mail, as electronic files to print and distribute.

So your first step is to read this information through, and to start thinking of how your own home stacks up - what do you need to do to be prepared for an emergency? Assign tasks to family members and start working through your family plan.

Then start thinking of your immediate neighborhood - that which the fire district has grouped together for their larger-scale planning, and those who are immediately adjacent to your home or property. How can you get together to talk about what you've just read?

If you are already friendly with your neighbors, this will be simple. The weekly coffee klatch or pot luck dinner, or maybe just getting together for a few minutes after carpooling the kids from school one afternoon. Share the materials, suggest meeting with a little bit larger group after everyone has read the packet, and you're on your way!

If your neighbors are more car-waving acquaintances, you'll need to be creative. Has anyone started a telephone tree in the past? Are your kids friends, or do you attend the same church or grange meetings? Perhaps copying this packet and spending an afternoon dropping off copies to a few of the more out-going folks on the block might get things started. Initiate conversations that might help to identify who might host a meeting, who's good on the computer (to develop your neighborhood list), who might know the folks at the end of the drive, etc. Keep track of who you talk to, convenient times to meet, who can do what, etc. Each time you make a contact in your area, ask for more names of other neighbors.

Holding Neighborhood Meetings

Neighborhood meetings are a time to get to know each other, to develop trust, to listen. The ultimate goal is to share personal information regarding the type of things shown on the Neighborhood Resource Sheet, so that you, as a group, can see where your collective resources and limitations lie. But it takes trust to open this dialogue, so get to know one another and stress that the information is only for your group's use, this is their plan for their own use in an emergency, and it won't be going outside the neighborhood.

There are several planning goals to work towards as a neighborhood group, and each requires someone with certain skills or strengths.

- ▶ Setting up local phone tree communication systems is something that you should start as soon as everyone is comfortable and eager to work together. This communication link can be (and has been!) used for many purposes, including a cougar sighting, a lost child or a burglary attempt. The concept is that folks at the top of the "tree" are always at home, so they can start the communications chain moving. Also, no one should be responsible for making more than a few calls, because in a wildfire evacuation situation, time is of the essence.
- ▶ As mentioned above, assessing your local strengths and weaknesses is vital to working effectively together. Take a look at the Neighborhood Resource Sheet to see the types of questions being asked. Are poor bridges or power lines or narrow, long driveways an issue? Do you have several folks who are physically unable to fend for themselves, who might be deaf, or using oxygen tanks? (*see information on the county Disaster Registry*) Are there a lot of children to account for? Are there day sleepers? Or, do several of you have herds of livestock that might need to be moved?

On the strengths side, who has a ham radio, bulldozer, chain saws, water tank or pond and a pump, livestock trailers, generator, or an irrigated open pasture? Who can cook for a large group of people, who has medical training or fire fighting experience, who was a welder or tree faller?

Use the information gleaned from the resource sheets to come up with solutions to some possible emergency scenarios for your neighborhood, including total evacuation, flooding, loss of electricity and or telephone service, etc. Roles should start to fall into place. You'll discover more weak points as well as more roles for folks to play.

Garnering Participation

Be prepared for the fact that some people will not come out to a meeting. Try to get people who do attend to volunteer to call on their more reticent neighbors and get a Neighborhood Resource Sheet completed if possible. Once a general degree of trust and organization begins to take place in your neighborhood, more folks will come around. Don't force anyone to participate, however, and don't ever give out a neighbor's telephone number unless they've told you it's OK to do so. Remember the trust factor. And, if you do end up with one lone person who doesn't want to come out to meetings, try to find someone who lives close by to take responsibility for running over to alert the resident of danger.

Tools to Use in Your Planning

The Fire District can work to provide you with a map of your neighborhood, if you don't already have one. Jackson County's Smartmap.org may be able to provide you with adequate information. Have neighbors review the map of their neighborhood together at meetings and provide any changes or additional information needed to make the map more accurate. This might be a new loop at the end of a driveway, for example.

Finally, identify two more neighborhood contact people besides the lead phone tree person: the name of the community person who can best act as liaison to emergency service personnel during a disaster, and, if possible, the name of someone in the neighborhood who can facilitate communications (CB, radio, etc.).

If your group is having problems with a particular issue or concept for evacuation, safe zones and such for your area, call and talk to the Fire Chief or the Operations Chief. They are also available to review your plans, once you're done.

FOR ASSISTANCE WITH:

Neighborhood Maps:

- ▶ Jackson County's GIS website, <http://www.co.jackson.or.us/> (go to Front Counter, the map section, or <http://www.smartmap.org/>)

Family Disaster Preparedness:

- ▶ Jackson County Emergency Preparedness Plan For Families, available at Applegate Valley Fire District HQ, 1095 Upper Applegate Rd.
- ▶ Josephine County website, <http://www.co.josephine.or.us/> (departments > sheriff > emergency management > Family Preparedness Handbook)
- ▶ American Red Cross, <http://www.arc.org/>

Emergency Medical Information:

- ▶ Disaster Registry of Jackson & Josephine counties, for individuals needing special help during a disaster), applications available at Applegate Valley Fire District HQ, 1095 Upper Applegate Rd., for information call Connie Saldana, RVCOG, 664-6676.
- ▶ Applegate Valley Rural Fire District #9: website: <http://www.applegatefd.com/> (Medical History Form)

Jackson County Emergency Information:

- ▶ Jackson County office of Emergency Management, Mike Curry: 774-6821
- ▶ Jackson County citizen's hotline/emergency information line: 776-7338 (during an event only)

Wildfire Information:

- ▶ Oregon Dept. of Forestry, Central Point: 664-3328; Grants Pass: 474-3152

Local Evacuation Issues & Questions:

- ▶ Applegate Valley Rural Fire District #9: Fire Chief Brett Fillis or Operations Chief Chris Wolfard: 899-1050; <http://www.applegatefd.com/>