

Santa Rosa Residents COPE with Emergencies

Winner, California League of Cities - Helen Putnam Award for Excellence 2007

Facing substantial risk from wildland fires and earthquakes, Santa Rosa citizens took action. Residents Sue Hattendorf and Al Thomas began training neighbors to prepare for the aftermath of a large-scale emergency, and the newly formed group adopted the name Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies (COPE) for its program.

Each COPE neighborhood selects a leader and two co-leaders. Each household in the neighborhood fills out a COPE "census" form that identifies anyone considered to be potentially vulnerable, such as the elderly, those with health ailments and physical disabilities, and single mothers with young children. The form also identifies people whose special skills and abilities are critical in an emergency, such as retired doctors, nurses, veterinarians and former military personnel, as well as those with useful equipment, like generators, chain saws, power tools and large gas grills.

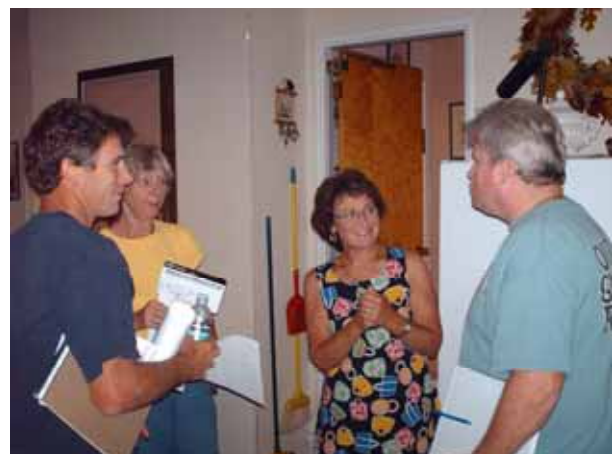
COPE encourages families to get training in First Aid, CPR, Community Emergency Response Teams and using fire extinguishers, among other things. Residents often find that they have people in their neighborhood capable of teaching some of these skills to COPE team members. They also encourage each other to develop emergency preparedness kits and perform nonstructural mitigation to secure items that could fall and injure people in an earthquake. The goal is to become a "temporary first responder" to neighbors, knowing that local police, fire and emergency medical services personnel will be overwhelmed with calls following a disaster or large-scale emergency.

Each neighborhood develops a block plan diagram with household information, utility shut-off locations and a designated meeting place where everyone will gather after an emergency to count heads and see who needs to be checked on. COPE team members stockpile supplies to deal with injuries and provide water, food and comfort to their neighbors.

Bringing People Together

The COPE Program was organized in 2003 in the Oakmont adult community in east Santa Rosa, and about two-thirds of the 2,800 households in its homeowners association now participate. There are currently over 400 COPE leaders in the city, covering more than 5 percent of Santa Rosa's 63,000 households. Many more communities in Sonoma County are also using COPE.

COPE encourages neighbors to socialize and hold "preparedness parties," which is one of most popular features of the program. Participants are known locally for their barbecues and potlucks. COPE leaders encourage their neighbors to have fun and become part of the preparedness efforts. Businesses, schools, churches and community organizations can also become COPE Community Partners to encourage their employees and members to prepare for emergencies.



COPE Leaders meet to discuss their neighborhood preparedness efforts in Santa Rosa

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Website Makes It Easy

The program established a website (www.cope.srcity.org) that features a 12-minute video about COPE. New leaders can download materials posted on the site and use them to train their neighbors. The program even allows neighborhood volunteers with radio equipment to report their damage assessment information to the district fire station and the city's Emergency Operations Center.

With the help of a Department of Homeland Security grant, the COPE video is being expanded, translated into Spanish and subtitled for the hearing impaired.

COPE's success lies in the enthusiasm of its neighborhood participants and the extra comfort of knowing that in an emergency, they are ready to look after each other until help arrives.

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COPE participants have fun at neighborhood preparedness fairs

The City of Santa Rosa won an Award for Excellence in the Public Safety category of the 2007 Helen Putnam Award for Excellence program. COPE was also awarded the Sonoma County "Pete Peterka Award" for Excellence in Emergency Management. For more information, visit www.cacities.org/helenputnam and cope.srcity.org