

Are You Prepared?

Are you prepared for the next local disaster—for example, if the Hayward Fault suddenly decides to let loose all that energy she's been storing away for hundreds of years? Are you prepared to:

- Do without tap water and electricity for three or more days?
- Do without gas for heating your home and for cooking?
- Find and reunite with your spouse and children when the big one strikes?
- Prevent or mitigate further damage or harm in the aftermath?
- Provide first aid to yourself or your loved ones?
- Evacuate your home and leave with your prized possessions on a moment's notice?

Are you prepared?

In the wake of the catastrophic Katrina or now Harvey, winds and ensuing floods clearly pointed out that 100,000 or so inhabitants trapped in and these cities were not prepared. True, the wind and water threats of a hurricane are considerably different from the seismic and fire threats of an earthquake. But, in general, preparing for a wide-spread catastrophe, no matter what the source of the threat, is not. There are lessons for us in the Montclair District to learn from what happened in New Orleans or Houston.

Lesson One—Threats may come from unexpected sources We have to expect the unexpected. When Katrina passed by, many thought the threat was over. The news media even told us that. Then the levee and flood walls broke. Days later, infectious disease and looters became threats. If there were plans to handle these additional threats, they were not evident by the way the emergency response institutions reacted.

Applied to Montclair, this means that we must be aware that the threat may not be over when the earthquake stops. The 1906 San Francisco quake is living proof that fires in the aftermath can be the major threats and sources of wide-spread destruction. Imagine what could happen

on a hot, windy summer day in the Montclair Hills if a hundred fires were to break out at the same time from damaged household gas lines throughout the East Bay. If you have earthquake response plans, do they include what to do and how to do it if wide-spread fires break out in the hills? Which way would you go, given the option, up hill or down hill when trying to escape the fire? Where would you go?

Lesson Two—Outside help may be slow and ineffective We cannot count on fast and effective aid from our government institutions. The slow and initially ineffective responses by local, State, and Federal institutions after Katrina hit New Orleans are well documented. All these institutions had emergency response plans. But, because of Lesson One, we cannot always count on things going according to plans. New Orleans had levees and flood walls built to withstand Category 3 hurricanes. They based their emergency plans on the levees and flood walls remaining intact. Katrina was Category 4 when it made landfall.

Applied to Montclair, wildfires, blocked streets, and lack of communications could very well undo any well-meaning and thought-out plans Oakland, FEMA, and the State OES might have. You must have plans and means for helping yourselves. Even simple plans could potentially save you grief after the Hayward Fault lets loose. For example, where do you and your loved ones meet if your home becomes uninhabitable and how do you all get to your meeting place when the usual means for transportation are not available?

Lesson Three—Communication may be impossible Electrical and telephone lines were blown down. Not even cell phones were on line after Katrina passed through. Whatever communications might have remained in the aftermath of the winds was soon wiped out by the wide-spread floods that followed. What few means survived the winds and floods were soon overloaded by concerned people both within and outside New Orleans. Even face to face communications were barred by the lack of dry and otherwise accessible streets.

Applied to Montclair, calls for help, if any help were available, could not be made by mobile or fixed line phones. Even an act as basic as running next door to warn your neighbors may not be feasible when confronted with a wildfire. Does your neighborhood have a plan for alerting each other of impending widespread threat? As many found out during the 1991 Oakland Hills firestorm, we could be on our own to get out of harm's way. Planning alternative escape routes, even bizarre ones like climbing over fences or repelling down cliffs, could save your life.

Lesson Four—72 hours of emergency resources may not be enough A week after Katrina ravaged New Orleans, survivors were still stranded and isolated from the basic necessities. Three days of survival food, water, and other provisions, recommended by many emergency response institutions, clearly were not enough. Further, after Katrina, there were few places where its survivors could buy supplies. Even if there were stocked and open stores, many of the stranded victims had no money and no access to working ATM's. Credit card readers were, of course, inoperable.

Applied to Montclair, as we discovered through the 1989 quake, electricity and telephones could be out for several days after a major trembler. There could be few or no workable ATM's and credit cards could be unusable wherever stores were unable to handle them manually. Do you have plans for having cash on hand for an extended period? You may not be able to use your home because of the damage. Temporary shelters, like hotels and motels, may be destroyed or filled up. Where will you and your family stay while your place is under major and extended repairs?

Lessons Learned Summed Up—Self Help may be Your Only Option. The TV images of New Orleans refugees trekking miles along Highway 10 or swimming across wide gaps of fouled water to seek dry land and help are still vivid. They remind us that, in the end, self-help may be the only help we get in the immediate hours following a catastrophic event.

For us living in the Montclair District, self-help starts with having a plan to respond to a major earthquake and possible wildfires. Those plans have to include alternative escape routes and means, identification of and means for acquiring survival resources including shelter, averting and mitigating further damage and harm, locating and gathering with loved ones, and getting help from neighborhood, local, State, and Federal agents.

The City of Oakland has an excellent Office of Emergency Services (OES). But it cannot do the emergency response job on its own. The OES recognizes that the citizens of Oakland will have to help themselves, especially in the early hours following a widespread catastrophe. So the OES has created and continues to sponsor the Citizens of Oakland Responding to Emergencies (CORE) organization.

CORE has an extensive program to train the citizens of Oakland on how to help themselves and each other before, during, and after catastrophic events, like earthquakes and wildfires. You can get most of the training in your own neighborhoods, with your own neighbors.

For more on CORE and the training they offer, you can contact:

Harriet Y. Wright Oakland Fire Department Office of Emergency Services 1605 Martin Luther King Jr. Way Oakland, CA 94612 Phone: (510) 238-3947 FAX: (510) 238-7761 CORE web site: <http://www.oaklandnet.com/fire/core/index.html>

And, above all, please Be Prepared.