

Town of Portola Valley



# Portola Valley Resource Guide To Organize Your Neighborhood To Respond To Emergencies

# Table of Contents

- 1** Why organize your neighborhood?
- 2** Purpose of this Handbook
- 3** What are the steps to organize a ready neighborhood?
- 5** Makeup of a Team
- 7** Identification and designation of area coordinators.
- 8** Communications
- 8** Available Resources to Support a Neighborhood Program
- 9** Conclusion
- 10** Sample invitation to neighbors for the inaugural meeting

# Why organize your neighborhood?

Individual and neighborhood preparedness may be the most important way to stay safe and survive a disaster such as a major earthquake or wildfire.

**Knowing your neighbors encourages each to look out for each other**

Well organized neighborhoods will provide the following benefits:

- Knowing your neighbors, their training, and skills that might be needed in an emergency.
- Recognizing neighbors with special needs that might require extra assistance during an emergency.
- Ensuring that your neighborhood can communicate with local and county emergency services.
- Allowing for central and decentralized storage of emergency equipment that would benefit individuals and the neighborhood.
- Encouraging training for those who might be interested.
- Knowing your neighbors encourages each to look out for each other.

# Purpose of this Handbook

There are many kinds of disasters (earthquakes, wildfires, floods, pandemics, etc.). Being prepared to deal with these disasters at the individual household or family level is the first and essential step towards neighborhood and community preparedness.

This handbook provides guidelines that will help neighborhood leaders get the process started by working with a plan that has been used to organize other Portola Valley neighborhoods. It was prepared by the Emergency Preparedness Committee of Portola Valley in recognition of how organized, trained, and connected neighbors contribute to a well-prepared community.

Success will depend on identifying and supporting a group of neighborhood leaders as they work through the process. You can be that person or part of the team that gets the ball rolling. When a disaster strikes, you and your neighbors will be glad you did.

# What are the steps to organize a ready neighborhood?

## 1

The first step is to identify and define your neighborhood. There are often natural boundaries such as blocks, homeowner associations, townhouses, or apartment buildings. It may be easier to start with a smaller group, although if it is too small all the work will fall on a few. The neighborhood could be expanded later, or several neighborhoods might join. Some neighborhoods may be only a dozen households and others over 100. You and your team will define your neighborhood.

## 2

Start by engaging neighbors you know and invite others you may not know. Explain why this is important to everyone. This may be done by inviting your neighbors to an "inaugural" meeting to discuss neighborhood interest, goals, protocols for collecting household data, contact information, emergency procedures, and setting up communication protocols, among other topics of common interest.

### 3

Develop a robust contact list to include the names of all household members, home and cell phone numbers, and email. You will need this information to set up communication protocols before an emergency and to use during an emergency.

### 4

It will be critical to identify, engage, and coordinate your activities through a leadership team of committed neighbors willing to work with you to make sure that your efforts succeed. This has been done before. It just takes committed people who can be relied upon to implement the neighborhood preparedness program.



# Makeup of a Team



The size of the team may vary by neighborhood but should have enough members to take on the following functions:

Gathering/ maintenance/ mapping of neighborhood resident information. This will be an ongoing and critical task

Development of communication protocols and procedures

Evacuation protocols particular to your neighborhood, and how it intersects with Portola Valley evacuation plans

Developing a plan for obtaining and storing emergency equipment and understanding how that relates to PV, CERT, or even county resources

Development of a library of selected emergency preparedness materials and pamphlets, with the goal of providing each household with a list of recommended resources

## Overall coordination of meetings and schedules

### Recruitment of new volunteers

Ensure that radio communication is available for your neighborhood should other communications be unavailable. This would require at least one or two people with HAM licenses and radios

Identifying available trainings for individuals and households

Identifying safe areas to assemble in an emergency

Each neighborhood will identify the function and organization of their leadership team, which will evolve over time. No one is likely to be successful doing this alone. The team is critical to success because it mirrors the engagement of your neighborhood and coordinates your preparedness efforts with committed residents who are willing to take responsibility for accomplishing the preparedness program. Such a team would usually be composed of 6 to 10 members, each of whom would accept an area of responsibility.



# Identification and designation of area coordinators.

Given that each neighborhood might encompass a considerable number of residences, it is very effective to break down the residences into areas and to identify an area coordinator (AC), and an assistant coordinator to serve as a back-up. The primary role of the AC is to facilitate communication, preparedness, and response in the event of an emergency, in a designated neighborhood area. It is anticipated that each coordinator would have responsibility for about 10 residences, and would be called upon to assist the leadership team in the following activities, consistent with his/her availability:

- Assist in the gathering of neighborhood information, and update information as needed
- Distribute emergency and preparedness materials and related packets as needed
- Be available to answer resident questions
- Facilitate evacuation within responsible area
- Check on maintenance of emergency/ evacuation equipment periodically
- Notify residents of emergencies (phone, in person, etc.)
- Periodically survey resident needs
- Facilitate implementation of preparedness protocols
- Notify team leader and members of developing neighborhood safety issues
- In emergency: assist damage assessment, utility shut off, search and rescue, damage suppression, road clearing, evacuation, transportation, reuniting families
- Facilitate practice drills for evacuation and emergency preparedness
- Identify neighborhood hazardous conditions
- Participate in periodic training and updates, as available

Each neighborhood and each homeowner can decide how much they want to be included or participate in. This is not a one size fits all.

# Communications

Communications among members of your neighborhood, as well as the Portola Valley Emergency Operations Center, CERT Incident Command, and San Mateo County Emergencies Center may be a significant challenge during an emergency. Landlines may not be available or overloaded, cellphone service may be down or spotty. Everyone will be trying to contact emergency services at the same time.

Part of your neighborhood planning should include identifying neighbors with experience or expertise in the use of GMRS and HAM radios using UHF, VHF, or HF frequencies. These capabilities may be the only way neighborhoods impacted by a disaster will be able to communicate with the outside services or persons they need. Some of those capabilities require little training; others require licensing that can be easily accomplished. Resources are available to assist you in these training efforts.

## Available Resources to Support a Neighborhood Program

As noted earlier, this playbook is provided to help you get started in establishing a successful neighborhood, prevention program. To assist you in this effort, there are many additional resources available so it is not necessary for you to start from scratch. Upon request, detailed materials can be provided from Portola Valley neighborhoods that have established successful programs. WPV-Ready can be a useful resource for materials and WPV-CERT for the training of interested neighbors. In addition, individual guidance and coaching can be made available to support your efforts and answer any questions. If this is desired, please contact the committee at [emergencyprep@portolavalley.net](mailto:emergencyprep@portolavalley.net) for assistance.

# Conclusion

One of the collateral benefits of embarking in a preventive program is the development of personal relationships with your neighbors who will undoubtedly be grateful for your efforts and extend their appreciation and friendship in return. In addition to having a better prepared neighborhood, you will have nurtured a stronger community and many new neighborhood friendships. Please consider a leadership role in developing your neighborhood prevention program, as it will result in a safer, committed and more resilient, knowledgeable, and friendly community. Good luck!



# Sample invitation to neighbors for the inaugural meeting

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Home address \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Neighbors:

We are truly blessed to live in this beautiful town of Portola Valley. Nonetheless, as we can see from the devastation of past California fires, and the ongoing threat of future emergencies which can arise in an earthquake country, we cannot ignore the importance of being prepared for an emergency in or around our communities. Such preparation can truly save lives and protect property in the event of an emergency.

In light of this, we would like to explore with our neighbors in [insert neighborhood] your interest in joining a neighborhood effort to protect our homes and property, in a realistic and cost-effective manner. We think that starting on a neighborhood basis will be more successful initially, and this can significantly enhance our safety and security in the event of a disaster.

However, we do not want to undertake this task if there is not a genuine interest from our neighbors in the immediate community to participate in this effort. Accordingly, we are sending this communication to ask whether you would be willing to join us in a meeting to discuss a plan to protect our families and homes. So much can be accomplished to achieve this objective, with even minimal effort. We hope you respond positively and join us in this endeavor.

Please call [insert name and phone #] or email him/her [insert email address] by \_\_\_\_\_ [insert date] to let us know if you are willing to meet and discuss a meaningful effort. We look forward to hearing from you and hopefully having you join this initiative.

Best, \_\_\_\_\_



**Portola Valley Neighborhood Emergency  
Response brought to you by the  
Emergency Preparedness Committee**

