

## **HARBOR AREA EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVE**

**By Lonna Calhoun**

In contemplating my experience in emergency management two axioms come to mind “*Ignorance is Bliss*” and “*Knowledge is Power*”. If I was ever blissful about the disproportionate ratio of hazards and vulnerabilities vs. the status of preparedness in my unique community – 9/11 and Katrina shattered any illusions. *Knowledge* of the potential for and ramifications of disaster in this community gave me the *power* and passion to form a grass roots community movement that transitioned into a 501(c) 3 nonprofit voluntary agency (VOLAG) whose mission is “*Promoting Emergency Management Through Proactive Community Outreach*”. In this community over 100,000 blissful citizens lack the knowledge, skills or supplies they need to self-sustain or possibly survive. Yet, until the formation of our organization no proactive harbor area emergency preparedness plan existed.

As the Executive Director of COPE Preparedness, I coordinate with local government and emergency support services to enhance emergency management for the communities that surround the Ports of Los Angeles (LA) and Long Beach (LB), California (harbor area). We have developed a “preparedness” subsystem addressing the priorities of saving lives, preventing injuries, preserving properties and the environment and contributing to incident stabilization.

### **Problem Statement:**

The Ports of LA/LB are the third largest in the world by container volume. The harbor area sits on a Peninsula with the Pacific Ocean on one side and the vast metropolis of Los Angeles on the other. Successful mass evacuation is unlikely, earthquakes are likely. We are a top terrorist target, Tsunamis can happen, Hazmat issues abound and the Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (HVA) we sponsored identified a host of other specific vulnerabilities.

A Los Angeles city audit found that *"emergency plans are outdated and incomplete; training is not approached strategically; correction actions go unresolved for long periods; and collaboration with other government, private and nonprofit entities needs strengthening."* At the onset of our community initiative the harbor area was unprepared to fulfill the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (HSPD-8) on National Preparedness and accompanying Target Capabilities List (TCL) which denotes capabilities that communities, the private sector, and all levels of government should collectively possess in order to respond effectively to disasters.

**Objective:**

To fulfill HSPD-8 directives and TCL capabilities by networking and aligning with the public and private sector, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and citizens in order to establish coordination, linkages, interoperability and partnerships to improve emergency management capabilities in mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery for the harbor area.

To reduce the burden of government and implement the *National Preparedness Guidelines* specifically section(s) 4.4 Strengthen Information Sharing and Collaboration Capabilities, 4.8 Community Preparedness: Strengthening Planning and Citizen Capabilities.

**Intended Outcomes:**

- Regional agencies are National Incident Management System (NIMS) compliant;
- Advancement of a culture of preparedness;
- Increased acceptance of personal responsibility to "prepare, train, and volunteer";
- Expanded access and availability to emergency information, training and supplies;
- Improved risk management planning and mitigation of vulnerabilities to increase resilience;

- Improved readiness among special needs populations, including people with disabilities, language and cultural differences, economic barriers, and age-related issues and concerns;
- Identification and implementation of effective practices learned from communities around the country and
- Enhanced ability to provide surge capacity support.

### **Human Resources:**

The nonprofit organization (NPO) is directed by the Board of Directors and Board of Advisors. NPO committees are comprised of representatives from a broad spectrum of community leaders. Direct collaboration was established with local first responder agencies, elected officials, the City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department (EMD) and the Area Maritime Security Committee (AMSC) which is the nationally recognized model tasked with organizing the efforts of emergency response organizations within the Ports of LA/LB.

Fulfillment of goals and objectives rely on volunteer participation and collaborative associations. Recruitment to the organization and support of the mission is accomplished through proactive networking with business, industry and a large continuum of community groups.

The main obstacles I encounter in recruiting volunteer involvement are:

- Most individuals do not believe their communities will ever be affected by any type of disaster;
- Perceptions of preparedness and response capabilities vary significantly by type of hazard;
- Individuals' high expectations of assistance from emergency responders may inhibit individual preparedness;

- Too few people understand why and how to stock adequate supplies and
- Socio-demographic characteristics correlate with attitudes toward and actions for preparedness.

I've found that the best way to overcome these barriers is to educate, inform and motivate while demonstrating a strong personal passion and offering simple, practical solutions to preparedness.

**Necessary Actions:**

A working group comprised of public and private sector representatives and community leaders was convened to determine capability targets, assess current capability levels, identify, analyze and choose options to fill gaps, design and update plans and strategies, allocate resources and execute program plans. The following necessary actions were determined:

- Acquire a Promulgation Document from Neighborhood Councils to gain official endorsement based on the City's Charter Reform of 1999;
- Incorporate as a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit VOLAG and maintain membership in the nationally recognized VOAD;
- Conduct a Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (HVA) which identified the following vulnerabilities:
  - Pandemic
  - Earthquake
  - Flooding
  - Fire
  - Drought
  - Tsunami
  - Terrorism

- Hazmat
  - Civil Unrest
  - Global Warming
  - Coastal Erosion
- Develop a community specific purpose statement, concept of operations, assignment of responsibilities, assessment of administration and logistics, and appropriate functional annexes;
  - Design and implement comprehensive community preparedness outreach presentations; include outreach to special populations including bi-lingual products/publications/presentations;
  - Educate the community on the typical human behavior reactions during disaster such as denial, delay, deliberation, fear, resilience, groupthink, panic, paralysis and heroism;
  - Provide emergency training and promote sources of training such as FEMA, CERT, Red Cross;
  - Conduct regional initiatives to identify and synchronize the availability of existing and future capabilities;
  - Solicit and utilize grant/donor dollars to provide emergency supplies to households and nonprofits in need;
  - Promote awareness of evacuation challenges and improve readiness for Sheltering-in-Place;
  - Implement a Map your Neighborhood (MYN) program based on model developed by Washington State EMD;
  - Conduct an Internet based mapping of local businesses and form Mutual Aid agreements and Standby Contracts that will improve resource management during a disaster;

- Expand communication interoperability by developing email, phone, text, distribution lists. Form alliances with Ham Radio clubs and operators and promote linkages;
- Improve capabilities of Mass Care (Sheltering, Feeding, and Related Services) and
- Promote the understanding that volunteers can impact—for better or worse—the ability of response agencies to respond to a disaster.

The initial action items required a three year time line; long term goals partially defined by Target Capability Lists (TCL) are ongoing since the community is continually changing. Measurable outcomes will be measured by the number of households, businesses and community organizations participating and should indicate consistent improvement.

#### **Material and Financial Resources:**

Grants, donations and in-kind contributions are solicited. Volunteer recruitment is ongoing and effective volunteer management is critical to achieving outcomes. Operating expenditures are kept to a minimum; proportionately 90 percent of funds are spent on deliverables. I am cognizant of the words of Lt. Gen. Russell Honore *"for every dollar you spend on preparedness you save \$9 in response"*.

#### **Conclusion:**

Harbor area citizens are among the *"80 percent of Americans who now live in or near cities that rely on a sprawling network to get food, water, electricity, transportation and medicine"* thus increasing their vulnerability. My mission is to act *today* so that the harbor area will be disaster ready *tomorrow*.

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