**NORTHWEST CERT SPONTANEOUS ASSEMBLY**

**Initial Steps for Assembly & Set Up of the NW Area Incident Command Post**

**Step 1: Check family, home & neighbors**

Immediate steps to take when an emergency event occurs were briefly covered. Remember to address the following actions in any emergency and take care of family and neighbors first. Seek out information from media sources and assessing your own situational awareness observations. Decide when you are comfortable with your home and neighborhood status before spontaneously reporting to the Northwest Assembly Area.

* Account for all family member’s safety and health
* Assess damage to home and personal property
* Assess neighbor’s situation
* Look for area-wide power outages or major destruction
* Look for emergency news, e.g., Nixle or CCWS, AM/FM radio (KBCS – 740 AM, 106.9 FM) TV, USGS website
* If emergency appears to be serious, spontaneously report to the Northwest Assembly Area at the Hope Center

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**Step 2: Dress appropriately and head to the Hope Center Assembly Area**

A brief reminder was provided to attendees of proper dress and equipment when reporting.

* Wear appropriate clothing and footwear, especially CERT vest, helmet, and ID card & have WATER
* Bring your personal protective equipment ...gloves, helmet, goggles, mask, boots, etc.
* Have at least one communications device: cell, radio, etc.
* If you have an FRS radio, check power level and turn it on to Channel 2
* Bring your CERT Backpack

**Step 3: Perform a Drive-By Sweep of Your Zone (and zones you pass through, if possible) as you converge to the Assembly Area**

Whether driving or walking to the Assembly Area, all volunteers should record observations and report observations to the Incident Commander or designee upon arrival. Hopefully you have done a survey of the Zone in which you reside, so you know the boundary of your Zone (i.e, the limits of where you should look), as well potential hazards. During a Drive-by sweep, (sometimes referred to as a “windshield sweep”since your observations will be through your windshield as you drive along), you will be looking for actual harm to people or property.

* Note and document injuries, property damage, hazardous conditions, etc., while proceeding to Hope Center Assembly Area
* Refer to your Zone Survey, if available, to look for impacts relative to potential hazards
* Share your observations with the Incident Commander or Scribe on arrival at the Assembly Area

**Step 4: First one to arrive is Incident Commander (IC)**

The hope with this training session is to provide an outline of simple steps that need to be initiated to begin setting up an ICP. Some people might be afraid of assuming the responsibility of being an Incident Commander, but just about anyone can get the ball rolling, particularly with regard to steps 5 through 10 below. It’s simply a matter of knowing what important steps need to be taken initially, what priority help is needed as volunteers arrive, and being willing to ask for that help. As more resources arrive and operations become more complicated, it is perfectly appropriate to ask more experienced volunteers to take over as IC at any time. Please note that contact info below regarding getting help with keys has been updated to add information for Jim Bonato.

* Ideally, the IC will access the NW Assembly Area and Tuff Shed Cache
* If unable to do so, proceed to Step 6 as best as you can and begin documenting who arrives and what was observed using any available writing material in your backpack. Also attempt to contact Jim Hirahara (mobile # (510) 459-5985 or home at 702 Falls Court) or Jim Bonato (mobile # (925) 917-0095 or at EOC/PH Police) for the box code and guidance, by mobile phone if possible or send a runner to their locations so that physical access to the Tuff Shed can eventually be achieved.

**Step 5: Gain Physical Access to NW Assembly Area and Tuff Shed Cache**

The NW Cache is a Tuff Shed located west of and behind the Hope Center, on a former set of tennis courts with high tennis court fencing surrounding it. These businesses are located in the furthest parking area at the far west end of the Hillcrest Center at 2261 Morello Ave. Look for X-Zact Fitness and follow the hallway left to the padlocked access gate.

The keys to the Tuff Shed are contained in a real estate-type lock box next to the gate. In the lock box, there is a set of three keys with instructions attached to the keys that will allow you to open the gate and Tuff Shed. There are other sheds in the tennis court area. The NW Tuff Shed is the first one to the right as you enter through the gate. The volunteers in attendance were given the code of the lock box but sharing it has been limited for security reasons. If any NW volunteer anticipates a need to gain access to the Tuff Shed on a regular basis or needs one time access for a particular need, please contact Jim Hirahara at (510) 459-5985.

Attendees were able to enter the Tuff Shed and observe its contents. The Tuff Shed contains general supplies and equipment to set up our NW Incident Command Post for full operations, including necessary support for Search & Rescue and Medical operations, during an emergency. Furniture such as pop-up tents (which are in the process of being purchased) as well as tables and chairs, are available in the Tuff Shed, but it is not a priority to set up the full layout of an Incident Command post initially. A simple table and chair set-up can serve as the Incident Commander’s “post” until these initial Steps for Set up of the ICP are completed.

Attendees were also shown a binder with Zone Surveys. It is a work in progress and can be valuable as a reference tool for the Incident Commander or Operations Chief to have when briefing a Search and Rescue Team of potential hazards as they are being deployed to a particular Zone. Forms and Zone Maps were also pointed out. It was suggested that labeling of these items needed to be more prominent so they could be more easily found. This is a follow-up action that will be taken by the Area Coordinator.

Six copies of the Pleasant Hill CERT Field Operations Manual (FOM) were shown to the attendees. The FOM is a reference guide containing a compilation of duties and responsibilities of key personnel, typically a few pages of guidance for each key personnel, as well as forms. This can be a valuable resource to seek out once the ICP is set up and review during any quiet moments.

An attendee inquired as to what were the most important things to look for in the Tuff Shed initially. Two priority resources important for initial set up of the ICP were shown to attendees.

* + The first action is to find a container with clipboards, each labeled with key personnel such as Incident Commander, Scribe, Staging, Operations Chief and Message Center, etc. Included on each clip board are forms that will likely be used as operations ramp up. The first person there would grab the Incident Commander clip board. This outline and useful forms will be contained on the Incident Commander’s clipboard as guidance. Then the IC would provide the Scribe clipboard to the second person arriving and ask them to record significant actions the IC may take or direct, and record any observations from subsequent arriving volunteers regarding injuries to people or damage to property, etc.
  + Next, the IC would provide a Staging clip board to the next arriving person to use to sign in subsequent arriving volunteers along with having these arriving volunteers fill out information cards to share personal information such as phone # and CERT skills/interests. If the Staging clipboard cannot be located, the Tuff Shed has writing pads and pens to use for sign-ins. It is essential for accountability of valuable human resources to know who has arrived so we can begin to keep track of each person.
* We will observe where main access gate is located
* We will look for key lock box and review how to operate the lock box
* We will learn how to use the three keys contained in the lock box that are needed to unlock access to the Tuff Shed
* A review of the contents of the Tuff Shed will be provided with special focus on the Pleasant Hill CERT Field Operations Manual and Northwest Area Zone Maps

**Step 6: Incident Commander (IC) assigns duties as volunteers arrive**

As mentioned above, clip boards for key personnel are available in the Tuff Shed and should be easily found in a clearly marked container. The first person arriving after the Incident Commander should be assigned the role of Scribe. The Scribe will be joined at the hip with the Incident Commander to keep a record of the IC’s important directions and information such as time of access to the Tuff Shed and appointment of the Scribe and Staging person, as well as observations from arriving volunteers. Another important duty is to keep track of arriving volunteers. This duty is assigned to a Staging leader, as discussed in more detail in Step 9 below. The final key person is a radio operator who, at the Incident Commander’s direction, will open the NW Area radio network as described in more detail in Step 8 below. Depending on how soon and how many volunteers show up, these initial duties may be undertaken as shared duties. For example, the Scribe may be asked by the Incident Commander to sign arriving volunteers in until a Staging leader is appointed.

* Inside the Tuff Shed, a box of clipboards labeled with key personnel can be used by the IC to hand out to arriving volunteers.
* Forms that will be useful to each key person are included with the labeled clipboards
* We will review general roles for the initial arrivers who will have priority duties

**Step 7: The second volunteer to arrive is assigned to be Scribe who begins documenting & collecting information from new arrivals**

The second person arriving after the Incident Commander should be assigned the role of Scribe. As requested by the Incident Commander, this person will document the IC’s important directions and information such as time of access to the Tuff Shed and appointment of the Scribe and Staging person, as well as observations from arriving volunteers. Depending on how many people are arriving at a given time, the Scribe may be asked to document observations from arriving volunteers through the Incident Commander or, if traffic is heavy, the IC may ask the Scribe to receive information and document observations from arriving volunteers directly from the volunteers. It is a very important duty to write down actions taken and accurately recording observations of volunteers. As will be reiterated often in CERT, if it isn’t written down, it didn’t happen.

* Assists IC with documenting observations from new arrivals
* Assists with Step 8 below and directs arriving volunteers to sign in and record observations
* Prepares messages for the IC
  + Potential requests to EOC for help, based on Zone Sweeps and/or observations of arriving volunteers
  + Potential information reporting to EOC
  + Drafts a message from the IC message in preparation for opening the FRS Radio Net in Step 8 below. (The message is “PH CERT Northwest Area, this is not a drill. This is the PH CERT Northwest Incident Command Post. If you can hear this message, please respond. Over.”)
  + Maintains written record of IC’s significant actions
  + As the ICP evolves, assists IC as required and serves as runner between IC and other staff such as ham radio operator and section chiefs

**Step 8: IC Opens FRS Radio Network for the NW Area**

The Incident Commander should try to open the FRS Radio Network as soon as possible. This duty may be assigned initially to the Scribe or Staging person, but a full-time message center operator can be assigned when the elevated antenna is set up. Opening the Network can simply be done by setting any available FRS radio on Channel 2 and broadcasting the message in Step 8 above, i.e., “PH CERT Northwest Area, this is not a drill. This is the PH CERT Northwest Incident Command Post. If you can hear this message, please respond. Over.” The NW Area has challenging conditions with hilly terrain so initial attempts at establishing contacts will be spotty. Patience will be required, but continued efforts to make contacts by FRS radio should be attempted. The assembly of our pole elevated antenna at the ICP in Step 10 below should enhance contacts markedly.

For those with whom we make contact, the ICP radio operator should confirm there is an emergency and ask the volunteer to assemble at the Hope Center NW Area as soon as possible, but remind them to take care of family and neighbors first, dress and prepare appropriately, and try to Survey their Zone on the way in. Any observation that can be shared should be documented.

* Open NW Area Network by transmitting the prepared message in Step 7
* We will review appropriate responses for the IC to provide to volunteers who respond to the “please respond” message to open the FRS Radio Network for the NW Area
* Recognize that due to the hilly terrain of the NW Area, many volunteers will not be able to hear the initial “Open Network” message. This should be mitigated when the set-up of the FRS/GMRS Antenna is done, at which time, the Message opening the NW Area Network should be repeated.

**Step 9: Set up Sign-In Table and Monitor Check-ins (early staging duty and possible role for arriving person #3)**

Attendees were shown a grease board indicating the location of the Sign-in Table to be hung on the side of the Tuff Shed above the Table, as well as the clip board with sign in forms and index cards. As volunteers arrive it is important to keep them in a relatively orderly group as they await assignments. The Staging person should ask arriving volunteers to assemble in a common location somewhere around the Tuff Shed, but away from the entrance to the Shed. Share whatever information about the emergency that is known. The Incident Commander should help with this, as well as make assignments such as setting up the GMRS/FRS radio antenna or bringing chairs and tables from the Shed to set up preliminary workstations.

* We will review how to set up the Sign-in Table, begin the sign-in process, and organize for staging
* A clipboard with Sign-in forms is available for documenting sign-ins
* Index cards with contact information and duty preferences should be completed at sign-in
* After person #3 arrives, the next arrivals could help with Step 10 or relieve prior volunteers in other assignments
* As more volunteers arrive, begin overseeing new arrivals in a staging are

**Step 10: Set up FRS/GMRS Antenna and Radio and Repeat Open Net message**

The FRS/GMRS Antenna was set up. Ideally two or three people should work together to extend the pole, attach cables from the antenna to the base radio, raise the pole and antenna, and zip tie the pole to the tennis court fencing. Anyone who is uncomfortable with the physical demands of raising the pole antenna should not be reluctant to speak up and can be excused. The NW Area also has an antenna and radio for a relay station that can be set up in a designated location at Paso Nogal Park. For our exercise, this relay station was not set up, but has been useful in past exercises in improving radio contact from certain locations where even the NW ICP base antenna had poor or no radio communication.

* We will review steps to set up our FRS/GMRS Antenna and Radio message center and relay station
* We will set up the FRS/GMRS Antenna and Radio message center

**Step 11: Assess and adjust assignments**

In the NW Area, we will try to identify volunteers who are interested in assuming key positions in the ICP and refine their skills during future exercises. Your interest in any key positions should be made known to the Area Coordinator and inquiries will be made in the future to seek out interested volunteers. Volunteers can express interest in multiple positions and having multiple volunteers identified to perform more than one key position would be ideal. During a significant emergency, there will likely be multiple days of operation and trained personnel who can provide relief to personnel from one shift to another will be essential.

If a less experienced volunteer is the first person reporting to the NW Assembly Area and is serving as Incident Commander, it would be appropriate to turnover those duties to a more experienced volunteer who arrives subsequently and who is willing to take over the duties. Some stability in performing the Scribe and Message Center Operator duties at the outset would be desirable since that person would be able to provide continuity for understanding how the ICP Set up has been unfolding.

The Incident Commander may wear several hats initially such as serving as Operations Chief when assigning Staging duties to an arriving volunteer. The IC’s decision as to when to assign Operations Chief, Staging Leader and Message Center duties will depend on the level of influx of volunteers, the experience level of early arrivers, and the urgency of specific needs for responding to the emergency at hand. Decisions do not need to be rushed and input from arriving volunteers, e.g., skills they may have to perform duties for key positions, should be promptly considered. Just remember that there is no such thing as a wrong decision, so do not hesitate to act.

* The IC will continuously assess suitable assignments as more new arrivals show up
* We will discuss appropriate transitions of key positions
  + IC
  + Operations Chief
  + Staging Leader
  + Message Center Operator

**Step 12: Establish ham radio communications with EOC**

No ham radio station was set up. Remember that ham radio operators will be assigned to each Area by the CERT Program Manager. The assignments will be made as soon as possible, but it may be a while before a ham operator arrives. The ham operators will bring their own radio equipment, and the Incident Commander can suggest a location and provide a small table and chair plus message forms for the ham operator to use for sending and receiving messages. It was pointed out that the ham operators are the radio communication link between each of the four Pleasant Hill Areas, including our NW Area, and the Emergency Operations Center at the PH Police Station. It only transmits radio messages from each Area Incident Commander to the EOC. (Future training will focus on the type of radio traffic this would entail.)

As a clarification, the GMRS/FRS Message Center set up in Step 10 above is for the purpose of transmitting radio messages within the NW Area only, for example from Search and Rescue Teams to the Operations Chief. No messages from any radio users on this network directly to the EOC are allowed. If a NW Search and Rescue Team member believes that a message should be sent to the EOC, it should be forwarded to the NW ICP Message Center and thenforwarded by the Incident Commander to the EOC through the ham radio operator channel.

* Ham operators have been instructed to report initially to the EOC regardless of the Area in which they reside
* The CERT Program Manager will assign a ham operator to NW Area subject to availability
* Remember that the ham operator is separate and distinct from the FRS/GMRS message center
* We will review the distinct roles of each and how they will set up the ham station

**Step 13: Set up Incident Commander’s Station**

No Incident Commander’s station was set up, but as noted earlier, it can initially be as simple as a small table and chair. As more volunteers arrive, a full set-up could be done, but it is not an urgent, top priority. Pop-up tents would be a key part of the set up, but none are available in the Tuff Shed and are on a re-supply purchase order to replace items stolen previously from the Shed.

It was recommended by one of the attendees that some sort of identification of key personnel such as a badge would be helpful to arriving volunteers. There are baseball-type caps in the Tuff Shed with some of the key position engraved the caps that could be used. A proposal at a recent CERT Foundation meeting was discussed to purchase multi-colored vest with names of key positions on them that could be worn.

* General responsibilities of the IC and location and minimalist setup will be reviewed

**Step 14: Appoint Operations Chief and Set up Operations Section Chief Station**

This will be a topic for more in depth discussion at a future NW Area meeting.

* General responsibilities of the Ops Chief and minimalist set up will be reviewed
  + Staging
  + Message Center
  + Plotter mapper
  + Search and Rescue
  + Medical
  + Transportation

**Step 15: Set up Briefing Board**

This will be a topic for more in depth discussion at a future NW Area Meeting

* Location and content will be reviewed

**End of training exercise**