

# **Evaluation of Northside EmPrep Earthquake Drill 17 October 2009**

**Tom Trippe**

Congratulations on a very successful drill. About 40 of our group participated along with observers from several other neighborhood groups. Thank you to all who participated. I acted as an observer, not directly participating in the drill. These are my observations, combined with comments from participants and a link to photos by Daniella.

## **Description of drill**

The purpose of the drill is to stimulate improvements in our preparedness for a disaster and to test our preparedness under the stress of a very demanding set of emergency situations. The drill provides practice for the trained members of our divisions and teams. It also teaches untrained neighbors where to go in an emergency in order to volunteer or to report problems.

The drill begins with a rapid search of the neighborhood to find twelve emergency situations and report them to our Incident Command Center. Response teams and equipment are dispatched to deal with the emergency situations and to report back to the Center.

The initial search is handled at the Division and Block level. Our neighborhood has about 135 households divided into three Divisions. Each Division is subdivided into three "Blocks" of about 15 houses each. Immediately after the disaster (10:00 AM for this drill) Division and Block Captains go to their Division Assembly Point to launch the search. The Block Captains search their blocks and report any emergency situations to their Division Captain, who communicates the situation to the Incident Command Center.

Immediately after the disaster, the leaders of Northside EmPrep and members of our standing teams in Fire Suppression, Light Search and Rescue, First Aid/Medical, Shelter/Logistics, and Communication go to our Incident Command Center where they open the cache, set up the Command Center, receive reports of emergency situations and dispatch the appropriate teams and equipment.

Emergency situations are logged on a bulletin board and the dispatch and resolution are noted. When all situations are resolved, everyone returns to the Incident Command Center for a debriefing.

No roles were assigned in advance. Instead we use the Incident Command System in which the first person to arrive takes on the Incident Commander role as well as all other roles. As others arrive, the Incident Commander assigns them roles or transfers roles, including their own, to more qualified persons.

## Preparations for the drill

Preparations began three months prior to the drill. This time was needed to complete many new and revised features of our system.

1. We developed Division Emergency Packets containing the maps, lists, pencils and paper needed for the initial neighborhood search for the twelve emergency situations. Each Division Captain and Vice-Captain had a copy, and the cache had a third copy in case neither the Captain nor Vice-Captain showed up.
2. We posted written instructions in the cache for setting up our Command Center and assigning roles.
3. We posted "3x5 role cards" describing the roles to be filled. Copies were to be given out as roles were assigned.
4. We added colored bandannas to identify team members with colored paisley bandannas to identify team leaders.
5. Signs indicating the team and volunteer gathering spots were mounted on tall posts so that they would be visible above people's heads. Instructions for sign placement were written on the signs.
6. We added six more walkie-talkies to the cache because of complaints of a shortage last year.
7. We obtained triplicate carbon copy forms for the Communications Specialist to use in recording emergency situations, so that he could keep one, give one to the bulletin board poster and another to the appropriate team leader.
8. We made a major update of the neighborhood map, adding many new gas shutoff, ladder, cribbing and wheelbarrow locations. We had a laminated version made for posting on the bulletin board.
9. We added a white board to the bulletin board, pre-formatted for summarizing the emergency situations.
10. We shuffled last year's set of twelve emergency situations so they would be posted in different Divisions. The emergency situations were described on pieces of paper taped to the doors of twelve houses whose locations were unknown to the Block Captains responsible for searching for them.
11. We revised our Emergency Response Plan to make it more accurate and internally consistent.

## Assessment of the drill

Although the drill was chaotic, it went better than previous drills in many respects. There was less chaos and people seemed to have a better idea of what to do.

**Boldfaced sentences below indicate action items to be done in the coming year before the next drill.**

The initial searches at the Division and Block level seem to have gone well, with most of the emergency situations being found and reported within a half an hour of the earthquake, by 10:30. I heard that some of the Division Captains had trouble reporting their emergency situations by walkie-talkie. At least one Division Captain reported that the Division Emergency Packet worked well. **All Division Captains need to confirm that their Division Emergency Packet was restored to original condition after the drill. If theirs was not the packet used, then they need to find out which one, Vice Captain's or cache's packet, was used so they can check that it has been restored to original condition.**

The first person to arrive at the cache did not want the role of Incident Commander because he had to leave early. Nevertheless he accepted the role temporarily, opened the cache, and followed the new written instructions posted on the cache door for setting up the Incident Command Center. As soon as a more qualified person, the Vice Captain of the Northside EmPrep group, arrived, he transferred the Incident Commander role to her and became the leader of the Medical/First Aid team, a good match to his qualifications. **The instructions on the door need to be enlarged and laminated.**

The new Incident Commander reported feeling that things were very chaotic as the reports came in and that she was somewhat overwhelmed. In previous years as Incident Commander I had a similar feeling of chaos and of being somewhat overwhelmed, so I suspect that this is par for the course. We are trying to handle twelve emergency situations in a very short period. The fire department tells me that even they would be overwhelmed by this many emergencies being reported within 15 or 20 minutes. **The Incident Commander reminded us that we need to formalize having an assistant to fill out the bulletin board and post information about emergency situations. Should this be someone from the Admin team or Communications Team?**

The Incident Commander also reported some communications problems. The large number of copies of emergency situation reports, some duplicates, was cumbersome. They were often incomplete as far as the details of the emergency situation so that it was unclear who to dispatch and what equipment to take. Some were not marked as to time or address and some had incorrect addresses. **We need to rethink this part of the communications, perhaps designing our own forms, using only duplicate forms, or perhaps introducing some other method of logging the reports and disseminating them.**

An extra set instructions and of 3x5 role cards were in an "Incident Commander's notebook", but no one noticed it and it remained on a shelf in the cache. **In the future we need to have this and other supplies in a single bag marked "Put on**

## **Incident Command/Communications table for Incident Commander and Communications Specialist.**

The signs indicating gathering spots for teams and volunteers were only partly put in place while some were left unused in the cache. The instructions on their placement were ignored. **We need to tie all of these signs together in the cache with clear instructions to put them all out and follow the placement instructions written on the back of the signs.**

Bandannas to identify leaders and team members were placed in clear plastic bags hanging from the team signs, with instructions on their use written on the bags. Most were used correctly but some were not. One team member wore the paisley bandanna, wrongly indicating that he was a team leader. Other team members did not wear bandannas and some did not wear them around their neck so that they were not visible from some directions. **We need to make the instructions clearer and should write "Fire Team Captain" on the red paisley bandanna, "Fire Team Member" on the plain red bandannas, etc. I have obtained no feedback on whether the bandannas were useful.**

3x5 Role Cards were also in the bag, but not all of these were distributed. **I have received no feedback on whether the 3x5 role cards were useful.**

The situations were posted on front doors and for the most part they were returned with the response information filled out on the back. Some did not have the addresses indicated. About 80% were clearly resolved by bringing the right equipment and teams while 20% were less clearly resolved, probably a documentation problem. See summary in Appendix A below. At the end of the drill it appeared, based on the bulletin board that all situations were resolved. However, the bulletin board was prematurely erased, eliminating the possibility of reviewing it. **The instructions for posting the emergency situations including their addresses and for filling out the form after the situation is resolved need improvement. We are losing valuable information about our drill. No team captain made any changes in their emergency situations, indicating to me that no effort was made to improve them. Next time, team captains need to participate and make improvements.**

The structure of having a separate fire team and damage assessment/search and rescue team may not be the best way to go. The fire department suggests putting together a team with fire, search and medical as needed, obviously not always the same structure. No fire or search are needed for a broken arm, for example.

There was a suggestion that we add a security team. The Admin Team needs to discuss this.

**We need to create an evaluation form for all participants to fill out at the end of the drill. We are losing valuable information and ideas by not doing this.**

## **Appendix A: Rough summary of responses.**

1. Unrecorded address. Power lines down, sparking, fire. Someone responded but apparently had no equipment and did none of the exercises.
2. 1635 Le Roy. Gas smell, doors unlocked, neighbors think someone may be home. Team sent but no documentation of response.
3. 2695 Le Conte. Partially off foundation. Noises inside, someone might be home. Search and rescue arrived with all necessary equipment except didn't have gas shut-off wrench.
4. Unrecorded address. Tree blocking entry to door, someone inside calling for help. Search and rescue arrived with saw, moved branch, called for medical help. Med team brought first aid packet, stabilized, figured how to get to hospital.
5. 1735 La Vereda, chimney collapsed, someone trapped but uninjured. Search and rescue responded with no cribbing or pry bar. freed person with homeowner's car jack.
6. 2665 Virginia, Damaged structure, elderly residents need shelter. Told to wait on front lawn, then took to shelter.
7. Unrecorded address. House collapsed. Four people need shelter and cant find dog. No documentation about response.
8. Unrecorded address. Eight people, two kittens displaced, need place to stay. Shelter arrived with map, found places for them to stay
9. Unrecorded address. Seriously damaged house, two injured occupants with broken limbs. Medical team arrived with splinting material and first aid kit, took care of patients.
10. Unrecorded address. Man injured, unconscious. Medical team arrived with no equipment.
11. 2706 Virginia, house OK, one resident screaming for help, Fire was extinguished but one resident burned arm. Fire suppression and medical responded. Medical kit needed burn ointment. Had fire hose and gas wrench.
12. 1629 La Vereda, garage oil fire. No documentation about response.
13. 2929 La Vereda. Non-existent address. No fire, situation resolved.

**Daniella Thompson's photographs from the drill are on our website:**

<http://northside-emprep.org/drill2009.html>