

PAN Emergency Preparedness Frequently Asked Questions

“No community is truly prepared for a disaster until every individual, family and household takes personal responsibility for preparedness,”
from the American Red Cross past President and CEO Marsha J. Evans.

BLOCK PREPAREDNESS COORDINATOR QUESTIONS

What is the role of a Block Preparedness Coordinator?

Interact with residents of your block and neighborhood, serve as a communication node for your block, and during an emergency/disaster report the conditions of your block.

What is the time commitment for a Block Preparedness Coordinator (BPC)?

There will be three training sessions of 1-2 hours in length that will cover topics as organizing your neighborhood, communications in a disaster and damage assessment.

You will be asked to introduce yourself to your neighbors & develop a neighborhood contact list. Depending on the size of your neighborhood and help from co-block coordinators, this can take a few hours or more. After that your ongoing time commitment could be as low as 1 hour per month. BPCs will gather once or twice a year to share their experiences & tips to help each other improve communications in their neighborhoods. We encourage block preparedness coordinators to get their neighbors together at least once a year.

How many houses do BPCs cover?

On average, BPCs cover 15-30 homes, depending on the physical make-up of the neighborhood and the block preparedness coordinators time, to coordinate neighborhood activities.

How do I get people interested and motivated to participate?

There are probably as many answers to this question as there are Block Preparedness Coordinators! One of the first things you can do to help yourself answer this question is to ask yourself why you were motivated to become a BPC. It may well be that many of the same issues that engaged your attention and passion will be the same ones that will motivate your neighbors. Perhaps it was because you felt too many of your neighbors didn't know one another, they may well feel the same way. If crime or concern about emergency preparedness got you involved, these may be issues that are foremost on your neighbors' minds.

You might want to begin your initial introduction to your neighbors by letting them know why you have chosen to become a BPC and by being very specific about the benefits of an active neighborhood organization. Once you have begun to host events, you might choose to expand your recruitment by writing a short newsletter notice about the success of your recent event and include highlights from the activity. You might also ask your initial participants to use their contacts and word- of-mouth to encourage other neighbors to join in.

What is the first event I should host?

This depends highly on your personal preference and level of familiarity with your neighbors. If you already know a lot of them, a Block Party might be a wonderful way to have fun, connect and attract new neighbors. If you prefer to start with a smaller event, you might want to host a Neighborhood Watch or an Emergency Preparedness Event. These are also events that tend to be easy to recruit since most people are concerned about the safety of their families and their neighborhood.

What should I do if only a few people respond?

If you have a few people respond, congratulate yourself on your efforts because this means you are on your way! Getting started is always the hardest part and once you have a few neighbors interested, they can help you get the ball rolling and help to energize you as you continue your recruitment.

What tools can I use to show neighbors that I am a legitimate representative of the City?

There are several ways you can show your neighbors your official affiliation as a BPC. One is by obtaining a Block Preparedness Coordinator ID Card. Another is by asking for a letter of introduction from your neighborhood association or the City. If you meet someone who is really wary, you can also provide him or her with PAPD Officer Ken Dueker's phone number (329-2406) for official confirmation of your status.

What is my liability for becoming a block or neighborhood preparedness coordinator?

BPCs and NPCs would not be Disaster Service Workers. That designation is for CERTS, ARES/RACES, etc. that are official government volunteers.

What kind of assistance can I expect from City Staff or Officials?

City officials, such as the Mayor and City Council members, are often available to attend your neighborhood meetings, upon request. Our City Manager Jim Keene and city staff are delighted you are volunteering your skills, talent, and time for the Block Coordinator program to help the City communicate with the neighborhoods. The City of Palo Alto can refer residents and/or potential BPCs to the appropriate neighborhood association. The Palo Alto Police Department will conduct presentations on the Neighborhood Watch program upon request.

Can I partner with others?

Co-Block Preparedness Coordinators are encouraged.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

What is "community emergency preparedness"?

Individuals and local organizations working together with government to prepare for disasters.

Why "community emergency preparedness"?

The broad answer: National policy seems to be turning quite strongly towards self-reliance for emergency preparedness and response. In our own personal views, it appears that community preparedness has the potential to fill in some gaps in existing services.

Are you talking about natural or man-made disasters?

Both. The past trend has been to maintain a significant separation between these, but it appears that this is being reversed somewhat recently. That said, certain aspects of both kinds of disasters will continue to be beyond the capabilities of community organizations.

Are you recruiting for a particular group?

We wouldn't mind if you joined your Residents Association, but besides that: No. Pick the group or viewpoint that best suits your talents and your needs. We believe that the richer the alternatives available in the community, the better.

I'm overwhelmed. Where do I start?

We have each admitted to ourselves and each other that the subject itself is overwhelming, and our best chance to deal with it is to work together, step-by-step.

Maybe because we don't know any better. Please enlighten us.

Will "community emergency preparedness" mean people will know my business?

Yes, you may end up disclosing more about yourself and your family in the process, but no one will force you to do so. You'll have to weigh the costs of disclosure and benefits of getting help from your neighbors. You'll likely find out more about your neighbors, too; with care, everyone should be able to keep privacy issues in balance.

I'm worried about the wrong person finding out I'm disabled.

If you are disabled and have difficulty during an emergency, preparing the right person to give you a hand could save your life.

Why are you forcing me to get to know my neighbors?

Generally, we think it is a good idea to know your neighbors, but no one will force you to do so.

Who are you to tell us what to do?

We're not telling you do anything. Do what you want. If you find community emergency preparedness to be worthwhile, then participate.

If there's a serious emergency, we're all going to die anyway, so why bother?

That may happen. We believe that we're improving our communal odds of survival by preparing. And, in the process, we feel a bit more in control of our fates.

Why are you supporting preparedness?

We believe we and our children and our neighbors will have a better chance of staying alive if something really bad happens.

Isn't preparedness a luxury of the rich?

Yes, and relatively speaking, so is eating three meals a day. This has nothing to do with preparedness.

I'm out of work, why should I expend effort on preparedness?

Earthquakes don't know your employment status; neither do terrorists.

Preparedness isn't as immediate issue as some others; why waste time and resources?

We agree that our community faces many important issues. We can't solve all of them, so we've chosen to work on one and perhaps make progress. We believe preparedness is an appropriate kind of insurance.

Why upset people with talk about disasters that are unlikely to occur?

By talking about potential disasters, we hope that the subject will become less upsetting. It is so for many people and for many difficult topics.

Can we trust the government to help us?

The government is asking us to become more self-reliant and helping us do it.

If things get bad, people are going to take what they want anyway, right?

If things get bad, there isn't going to be a lot to take.

I pay my taxes. Why isn't the government taking care of this?

We generally believe that the government is doing the right part of the preparedness job and it is the community's job to do its proper job.

Isn't it my right to be left alone during a disaster?

If that is what you want. Why don't you prepare as part of the community and make up your mind when the time comes? Besides that, you might want to help someone else.

I don't like my neighbor, so why should I help him in an emergency?

There's a good chance he will help you, so you might want to reconsider your view of him.

I don't want anyone to help me; I don't want to owe anyone, especially a stranger.

Then improve your odds by getting to know a lot more of your neighbors.

Why should I make efforts that might support people from outside Palo Alto?

Keep in mind that many of the professionals that will almost certainly risk their lives for Palo Alto residents during a disaster don't live here. Besides that, you may want to improve the chances that your child or your parent who happens to be in another community during a disaster would be equally well cared for.

Can we prepare for a pandemic flu?

Of course! Wash your hands frequently. Cover your cough with your arm, not your hand. Get a flu shot. Stay home if you are sick. Because you will be sick for 10-14 days, you won't feel like going out to buy cough and fever medication (not to mention it may be sold out). Be sure you keep a stock of your favorite remedies on hand. Don't forget that you'll need to stay hydrated. Have a good supply of electrolyte fluid (Gatorade, Pedialyte, etc) on hand. If you're responsible for feeding the family, you'll want to have extra food available for them. You won't feel like cooking! Together we prepare – together we'll get through anything!

A list of flu preparedness supplies and basic preparedness supplies is available on the PAN website <http://www.mimi.com/mra/pan/ep/flu/flu.htm>.