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CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

The ability to communicate information about an event, its impacts, what is being done and what must be done is essential after earthquakes and other emergencies.

Recent disasters have shown that telephone and other communications systems might not be available when they are needed.

The magnitude 6.7 Northridge earthquake on January 17, 1994, caused limited interruptions in service due to damaged telephone lines as well as equipment malfunctions.

The problem became worse when many southern California residents tied up the lines with calls. In fact, the number of calls at one central office increased from 2,000 to 250,000 per hour.

Damage to the phone system or overloading in a future earthquake might make it difficult for affected persons to obtain assistance.

Your neighborhood can enhance its ability to contact emergency response agencies by including emergency communications personnel and equipment as part of its neighborhood response plan.

SELECTING A TEAM

Your neighborhood planning committee should review the skills surveys completed by residents to identify a coordinator and members of the communications team.

Reducing the Risk in 1996



Monthly Preparedness Items and Actions

January

Understanding the Threat

February

Start It Up

March

Neighborhood Hazard Reduction

April

Community Resources

May

Neighborhood Emergency Supplies

June

Neighborhood Response Teams

July

Skills Training

August

Emergency Shelter

September

Assessing the Damage

October

Search and Rescue

November

Creative First Aid

December

Plan Your Drill

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Because of their training and the likely effectiveness of their equipment, licensed radio operators are best-suited to serve on this team.

If no one in your neighborhood has such skills, your planning committee might want to canvass other neighborhoods for qualified persons.

PRE-QUAKE ACTIVITIES

Once your communications coordinator and team have been identified, preparations for future emergencies should begin. The communications team should:

- Identify a communications center; the communications center can be located at your coordination center or another designated location
- Ensure that battery powered radios and televisions are available for monitoring newscasts
- Identify local radio stations that are part of the Emergency Alert System
- Review the surveys completed by each neighbor to ensure that each has an out-of-town contact (it's much easier to call outside the area)
- Remind neighbors to use their phones only in an emergency
- Be aware that road conditions can make travel by car impossible
- Consider other methods of sending messages, including:

