

Winter snowstorm a reminder that neighbors need to plan for emergencies

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

Most businesses closed either early or tried to stay open as best as possible during the early February snowstorm which dropped a foot of snow in Southwest Portland.

First Friday was cancelled in Multnomah Village. School activities and sports were postponed. Buses ran late, slowly, and infrequently much of the storm.

The electricity shut off and water pipes busted.

But for local residents Bob Cogan and his cousin Jean Fitzgerald, all went as planned; at least for them.

"This is a perfect time to become acquainted with emergency preparedness and become part of a team," Fitzgerald said while sipping on a hot tea.

The cousins have been out canvassing just a small part of their Multnomah neighborhood to conduct outreach and ask neighbors to join a team to be ready for an emergency.

"Just this little bit of snow makes you a prisoner in your own home," Cogan said as he showed off his two-week supply of emergency water and food

in his apartment.

"My sister called me just now to see if I had lost electricity," Fitzgerald related. "What will you do when you can't use the Internet or listen to the TV or radio for updates?"

"This snow is a wakeup call for everyone," Cogan warned. "Next time it could be an earthquake, flood, or civil unrest."

Cogan went on to explain how the Neighborhood Emergency Teams worked in each community. A roster is made up of adjoining streets with names of all residents and animals, phone numbers, and emails.



Multnomah residents Peter Samson and Robin Schaffler brave the snowy weather en route to O'Connor's Restaurant and Bar in Multnomah Village. Neighbors and businesses need each other during an emergency. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Skills are added such as nurse, plumber, and electrician. Professional or governmental help may not come for days depending on the situation.

The Post sat down with the cousins in Cogan's apartment for the following interview.

Q: What is your main purpose in becoming involved with this team?

Cogan: To help other people get organized in the event of a major emergency.

Fitzgerald: We surveyed folks and got nine out of 23 surveys back. We hope people become more serious.

Cogan: We tried getting information to everyone through the Internet but privacy is an issue for some. So we visited two dozen homes. We want to form teams about emergency preparedness and assist folks with suggestions on how to become prepared.

Q: What are some key messages?

Fitzgerald: Do you have cash on hand in case ATMs are down? Do you have extra medications packed somewhere to take with you? What about pet needs?

Cogan: Well, some of the responses

we heard were, 'Well if I die, I die!' or 'I'm too busy right now to get organized'.

Q: What made you get involved?

Cogan: We heard some national geologists speak at an event a while back and showed us information of natural disasters in Japan and California. We were shook up! We're also overdue for a large quake.

Fitzgerald: Hillsdale residents Lynn Rossing and John Morris are very organized and prepared. They became co-chairs of the Hillsdale Neighborhood Emergency Team. NETs are made up of residents trained by the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management.

Q: What is one more thing you like the community to know?

Cogan: Be prepared.

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