

CITIZEN MEDICS

Team could be deployed in an emergency

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Two years ago, a budding medical reserve corps in Cannon Beach started with four orange tubs filled with basic medical supplies and a couple of passionate volunteers.

Now, a few grants and a significant number of donations later, the volunteer emergency preparedness group has amassed more than 4,200 individual medical items that can be distributed in an emergency.

The group of 23 local volunteer surgeons, nurses, counselors and other health care specialists is the only one of its kind in Clatsop County, and only one of four on the Oregon Coast. It has been slowly growing and training to be a team that can be deployed to address medical needs in an emergency.

The concept of a medical reserve corps is nothing new. The corps, a national network of volunteers charged with improving the health and

safety of their communities, has existed for decades. More than 900 groups are registered throughout the United States. There is also a statewide registry of health care professionals who can be deployed in an emergency.

But Cannon Beach is a part of a small but growing number of cities taking emergency management practices into their own hands, Clatsop County Emergency Manager Tiffany Brown said. It is unusual for a city to take on operational training and supply requirements of a medical reserve corps — most are operated through a countywide public health authority.

It's even more unusual for a city of 1,700 people to do so.

"(There is) a general trend down the coast and rural counties in general to begin local planning and commit local resources in anticipation that the traditional, perhaps more regional, resources will not be available," Brown said.

'Boots on the ground'

The idea to start a medical reserve corps in town came out of the greater need to have more disaster response volunteers, since a majority of city staff and first responders do

not live in Cannon Beach.

"We already had a (Community Emergency Response Team) program, but we were missing the specialists after an emergency," Cannon Beach Emergency Management Consultant Stacy Burr said. "This is really about getting boots on the ground to multiply medical services. Because when you only have a couple of paramedics in town during an emergency, you are pretty much overwhelmed."

Part of the drive came from medical reserve corps coordinator Lila Wickham, who was inspired to launch a unit in Cannon Beach after participating in an earthquake and tsunami drill at Camp Rilea. Wickham was concerned about the town's lack of a hospital to provide medical services, particularly during emergencies.

The need for local resources was bolstered by memories of the Great Coastal Gale in 2007, which led to flooding and road closures that isolated Cannon Beach for days, preventing agencies like the Red Cross from responding. The county has a variety of public-health related cache sites, but none specifically in Cannon Beach.



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Medical supplies are among the items stored near Cannon Beach in the event of an emergency.



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Some of the items in the storage facility include supplies stockpiled by private citizens.

"We stepped in, because we had nothing," Wickham said.

These needs are part of the reason why the corps has a stronger focus on training to be "medics in the field," Burr said, rather than the more general charges of a public health agency.

Wickham and fellow coordinator Bob Wayne, a retired surgeon, now work with Burr and Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn to conduct state-prescribed training on handling how to triage a mass casualty scene, drownings, shelter management and other first aid.

When they aren't training, Wickham works to grow their stockpile by writing grants for supplies or organizing the donations they receive from Columbia Memorial Hospital and Providence Seaside Hospital. In the cache sites, shelves are stacked high with meticulously organized boxes of supplies like bandages, hemostatic agents, gauze and aspirin.

"This is really different

'I THINK IT ALSO MAKES YOU MORE IMPASSIONED IF YOU CHOOSE TO DO THIS!'

Lila Wickham,
medical reserve corps coordinator

from the hospital environment most of us are used to," Wickham said of the volunteers. "Treating people in an austere environment has a whole new set of challenges. We work off a nationally standardized triage system. You can't spend time on people who are probably going to die. You don't have all the conveniences that you would in a hospital. It's just not how we think in a clinical environment. And it's important to train like it."

'Different dynamic'

Running a program like this in such a small town does run some risks.

"If it was run through a health authority, they have a

larger footprint. So if one of your team members moved away, you could still have continuity because the institution has a larger pool to draw from," she said. "Everyone here is a volunteer."

But that same shortcoming is also what Wickham attributes to the corps' early success.

"I think it also makes you more impassioned if you choose to do this. You won't be reimbursed," she said. "It's interesting to be in a team with your neighbors doing this. One day I see you around town, the next day you are playing a victim in a mass casualty drill. It's just a different dynamic."

Burr hopes to grow the number of volunteers as quickly as they did the supplies, inviting professionals from surgeons to social workers to join, she said. They also need to bolster their pediatric and veterinary supplies, such as baby formula and diapers.

"In the end, all we have to rely on in an emergency is who is there," Wickham said.

CANNON BEACH POLICE LOG

Feb. 1
2:48 a.m., Larch and Sixth: Police assist a motorist who ran out of gas. Driver was given a courtesy lift to a gas station, and then back to their vehicle.

Feb. 2
1:13 a.m., West Gower Avenue: Police respond to a 911 hang up call at a hotel. Upon arrival, they encounter intoxicated subjects involved in a verbal altercation. Both parties were deemed not a danger to themselves or each other; they were advised to sober up.

Feb. 3
11:22 p.m., 800 block N. Hemlock: Police respond to a report of someone using a stun gun to intimidate and frighten another person. Alcohol was involved. Officers made contact with both parties. No crime was reported.

Feb. 4
4:37 p.m., Elliot Way: Police respond to a complaint of a subject entering a homeowner's yard to deposit garbage in their trash bin. The homeowner observed the offense with a security camera. Police issued a formal warning to the trespasser.

Feb. 5
9:11 p.m., 100 block W. Warren Way: Police respond to a report of loud music coming from a restaurant kitchen. Officers were unable to locate or hear any music.

Feb. 6
12:13 p.m., 200 block Nebesma: Cannon Beach police assist the Cannon Beach Fire Department.

1:35 p.m., 200 block Broadway: Cannon Beach police assist Seaside police.

5:42 p.m., Haystack Rock: Police advise a drone user of the rules and regulations regarding drone usage.

Feb. 7
10 a.m., Police Headquarters: Lost keys are reported.

3:05 p.m., Police headquarters: A lost cell phone is reported.

4:28 p.m., Beach and Second Street: Suspicious circumstances are reported.

Feb. 8
2:58 a.m., Spruce Street: Subjects are warned of overnight camping.

2:36 p.m., Fifth and Ecola: A motor vehicle hit and run accident is reported between a vehicle and the pump station.

Feb. 9
12:55 a.m., Hemlock and Third: Officers encounter two subjects, one carrying a handmade sword made of scrap metal. Subjects were cooperative.

5:34 p.m., 100 block E. Gower: A missing person is reported. Police say the subject has medical issues and came to the police station to be reunited with family.

5:37 p.m., 100 block E. Gower: A subject short of breath was brought to the police station for assistance.

11:58 p.m., U.S. Highway 101: Assistance was rendered.

Feb. 10
1:22 p.m., Haystack Rock: Police respond to a report of people going behind the HRAP ropes; police clear people from restricted areas.

2:26 p.m., Beach: A found cell phone is turned in and united with its owner.

2:57 p.m., Elliot and Spruce: A motor vehicle hit and run accident is reported.

Feb. 11
9:20 a.m., 200 block N. Hemlock: A customer causing a disturbance attempting to retrieve items from an OSP impounded vehicle without authorization resulted in a call for police assistance. Officer warned subject and advised the proper procedure for retrieving personal belongings. Officer advised subject they were driving while license suspended. Subject drove away in front of officer. Officer initiated a traffic stop. Officer cited subject for driving while license suspended and no proof of insurance.

4:37 p.m., Hemlock and Umpqua: police respond to a report of an intoxicated woman. The woman is located.

Feb. 12
8:49 a.m., Downtown: An unlocked

vehicle is entered and items are removed.

9:40 a.m. The Beach: A lost wallet is returned to its owner.

11:46 a.m. Haystack parking lot: A camera is stolen from a rental car. There is no sign of forced entry. Incident is believed to have occurred between on the 11th between 4 and 5 p.m.

3:16 p.m. 500 block Vine Maple: A code violation is reported regarding tree removal without a permit. Police contacted the subject who came to the police department on Feb. 13 to be advised the location where they were cutting is still within city limits and that the tree was located on private property. The subject was advised he would need to speak with the property owner, to advise of what had occurred, and that he would need to obtain a permit, and owner permission, to continue.

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