

Neighbor Helping Neighbor

By Dr. Kenneth S. Cheng

At press time, a magnitude 7.5 earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck the Indonesian coast resulting in at least 1200 deaths; a number that is certain to rise as thousands are still missing. We are reminded that Indonesia, like California, sit on the Pacific “Ring of Fire” a seismically active region encompassing the Pacific Ocean. In August of 2018, the Ring of Fire experienced 70 earthquakes in a 48 hour period. Recent studies from the U.S. Geologic Survey have concluded that prior reports of earthquake intensity and the probability for the next “Big One” have been underestimated. Research has found that two parallel faults rupturing at the same time (even though one caused the rupture of the other) have occurred in the past. This causes our prior estimate of a 7.8 earthquake to go up to an 8.0 earthquake (one source even projected a 9.0 earthquake in California.) Additionally, the likelihood of this level of earthquake occurring in the next 30 years goes from 4% to 7%. Although this may sound small, imagine if someone told you that you have a 7% chance of winning the PowerBall Lottery in the next 30 year. Those are certainly odds that I would like to have. All of this is to bring to your attention that an earthquake emergency is **likely** to occur in our lifetime, and to bring to your attention the necessity to prepare for such an event. Not only should you prepare, but also you should strongly encourage your neighbors to do the same. Why your neighbors? Because research has shown that over 90% of aid provided during a disaster comes not from public agencies but from friends and neighbors. Any assistance you might need is likely to come from your neighbors. The concept of “Neighbor Helping Neighbor” is the foundational element of the Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee. This is accomplished by having groups of Block Captains and Area Coordinators to assist our community in the event of a major disaster. This month, we will focus on the specifics of how Block Captains and Area Coordinators will be an important link in the “Neighbor Helping Neighbor” network.

By definition, a disaster is an event that will overwhelm the existing resources available to aid disaster victims and that a call to 9-1-1, even if it gets through the jammed phone lines, will likely result in no assistance for days or weeks. The anticipated lack of outside help compels all of us to prepare ourselves and, if possible, to be ready to assist others within our community. Studies from major disasters show that most aid to disaster victims comes from neighbors and others within the community, and not from disaster workers or relief organizations. Members of your Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee are committed to the belief that Neighbor Helping Neighbor is how our community will survive a large scale disaster. Fortunately, committee members include individuals who are proficient with Ham radio communications, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trained, Search and Rescue trained, disaster medicine trained, and individuals who have already taken steps to prepare and have the skills and knowledge to assist. They have volunteered hundreds of hours of their time to helping our community be better prepared through:

- Educating residents on emergency preparedness,

- Being a resource for disaster preparedness,
- Developing an emergency communication system within Nellie Gail and to outside entities even when all utilities are non-functional, and
- Being capable of providing limited first aid during a regional disaster.

The Block Captain and Area Coordinators will be your direct link to all of these and other resources.

BLOCK CAPTAINS

Block Captains are residents of Nellie Gail who live on your block or are within a short walking distance to you. He or she will “oversee” approximately 12 - 20 households and will be your link to the Emergency Preparedness Committee Command Center. The role of the Block Captain is to make sure his or her 12 - 20 households are safe and are not in need of urgent assistance. He or she will be trained on radio communications to the Area Coordinators and/or Command Center, and will also have additional training on how to turn off utilities, light search and rescue, and basic first aid. The Block Captain is your local resource expert; your first line of defense when help is needed. If the Block Captain determines that one of their residents are in need of assistance, the Block Captain can either provide the assistance, seek others within his or her block to assist, or can contact the Area Coordinator (see below) for assistance. As an example, if a resident smells gas in the house and doesn’t know what to do, her Block Captain, in the process of checking on his neighbors, helps this resident by turning off the gas main.

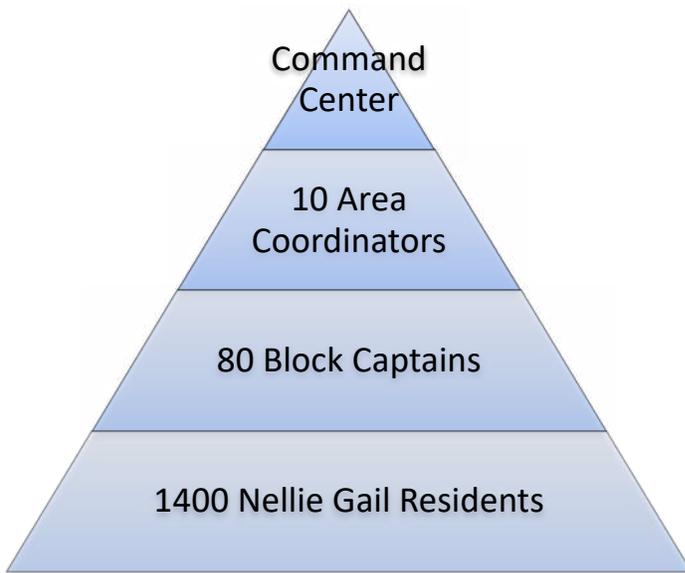
AREA COORDINATORS

Area Coordinators are residents of Nellie Gail who, like the Block Captains, have skills and training to assist residents, but also have advanced capabilities of communications through Ham radios. These individuals will oversee 8-10 Block Captains and will be in direct contact with the Nellie Gail Command Center through their Ham radios. They will also be a resource to their Block Captains who are in need of assistance as the Area Coordinator may be able to enlist the aid of his or her remaining 7-9 other Block Captains. As an example, Block Captain “1” informs his Area Coordinator that he has a resident who has severely injured his ankle. The Area Coordinator broadcasts this information to his 9 other Block Captains and hears back from two: Block Captain “3” has a resident who is a physician and Block Captain “7” has a resident who has some unused crutches. The Area Coordinator now coordinates this help with all three Block Captains. Using this same example one step further, had the Area Coordinator not heard back from any of his Block Captains, then the Area Coordinator would then contact the Command Center and the Command Center could broadcast the request for help to other Area Coordinators.

COMMAND CENTER

During a disaster, the Command Center (located at the Nellie Gail Clubhouse) will be staffed by members of the Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee. From the Command Center, we will be able to coordinate many of the needs of the residents through the Block Captains and Area Coordinators. In addition, the Command Center will have communication access to the Emergency Operations Center for Orange County and other aid resources via Ham radio. The Command Center will also have a limited amount of first aid supplies, water, and electrical generator capabilities. Please note:

The Command Center DOES NOT have the capabilities of being your “earthquake kit” during a disaster. It will **not** be providing all the food, water, and shelter needs of this community. We do, however, have the resources to provide you with all the information necessary to prepare you and your family for a disaster (i.e. pre-disaster planning.)



Just within the Nellie Gail community, the resources we have are enormous. The skills sets in our community include a variety of medical, dental, and veterinary doctors and nurses, psychologists, structural engineers and construction experts, fire and law enforcement personnel, search and rescue experts just to name a few. We can coordinate and utilize these resources within our Nellie Gail community through the Neighbor Helping Neighbor concept in conjunction with our system of Block Captains, Area Coordinators and the Command Center.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

First and foremost, spend a half-day and assemble your own earthquake kit. A step-by-step “how to” was published in the August 2018 issue of the *Pony Express*. Even better, gather several of your neighbors and assemble your kits together.

Secondly, consider being a Block Captain. The role of the Block Captain is of great importance and during a disaster, a necessary link between residents and the Command Center. We are seeking volunteers for the position of Block Captain. The requirements are:

- Commit to assembling your earthquake kit
- Volunteer 1 (one) hour every 3 to 6 months
- Willingness to help your immediate neighbors, if needed.

No skills are necessary as you will be provided the following:

- Basic survival skills through “Block Captain” educational classes and events
- Basic first aid (and CPR, optional)
- Radio communication skills for communicating with others in the community
- Basic tools and supply list to make your survival and your role as a Block Captain easier

As you can see, the time commitment is minimal but the importance is great.

To learn more about being a Block Captain or Area Coordinator, or to get more information on Nellie Gail’s Emergency Preparedness Committee, please contact this author at kennethscheng@gmail.com.