

Marina Bay Neighborhood Creates Community Emergency Response Team

Residents of several Marina Bay subdivisions have formed a Community Emergency Response Team (“CERT”) so they are prepared to help their families and neighbors when a disaster strikes.

Experts, including the United States Geological Survey (“USGS”), say a major disaster such as an earthquake of magnitude 6.70 or greater will strike the Bay Area within the next 22 years. The biggest concern in the area is the Hayward fault, which passes through Richmond just a few miles to the east of greater Marina Bay. The Association of Bay Area Governments (“ABAG”) estimates that Richmond would be hard hit by an earthquake on the North Hayward fault.

Marina Bay neighborhood residents should not be misled by the term “22 years.” The key to the prediction above is “within”, meaning the disaster could hit tomorrow, or five minutes after you read this article.

CERT is a free nationwide program that teaches trained teams to organize, extinguish small fires, perform triage (determine which injured people need the most immediate attention), extricate trapped individuals, search damaged buildings, how and when to shut off (or not shut off) utilities, communicate using two-way radios and other important skills. In non-disaster times CERT teams can also be used to assist local public safety personnel to help direct traffic at events, distribute important information door to door, and staff information tables at public events such as Richmond’s Homefront Festival.

Once a CERT team is formed and has selected its leaders, the City of Richmond provides additional training and equipment. The Marina Bay CERT team elected Harvey Tai of Anchor Cove as its team leader. Tai was the catalyst in forming the team, contacting many of his neighbors as well as other Marina Bay neighborhood residents who took the CERT training with Harvey and his wife.

“I realize how important this training is,” said Tai. “If we aren’t ready to help ourselves and our neighbors when the disaster comes, we will all be in big trouble.” Tai said another reason for taking disaster preparedness seriously is our dependence on local bridges and highways for outside help to arrive. “If the area’s bridges are down, outside help and supplies may take a long time to reach us. We must be prepared to help ourselves and our neighbors for several days.”

Once a CERT team has selected its leaders, the City of Richmond provides training in the use of radio equipment and issues additional equipment to the CERT team, including radios. It also conducts hands-on drills every six months. The drills are held on the last Saturday of April and October.

The 20-hour CERT program is offered in Richmond several times a year, and culminates with an all-day hands-on city-wide drill conducted jointly with other surrounding cities. As much realism as possible is incorporated into the drill as teams search a darkened, smoky building, remove a person from fallen debris (during training a “dummy” is used), extinguish small fires under the supervision of local firefighters and practice the other skills they learned.

Once teams complete the 20 hour course including the hands-on drill, they become certified CERT members and receive an equipment backpack with gloves, helmet, safety vest and other safety equipment. The actual equipment issued each year depends on the money available to purchase the items.

The Marina Bay neighborhood team, under Harvey Tai's leadership, meets monthly. Jim Mallory, another Marina Bay resident, is a team member and also a certified CERT instructor who teaches many of the CERT course classes. Mallory serves as the team training instructor, devising various refresher training and hands-on exercises for each month's meeting. "Training is what keeps our skills sharp. It also helps keep team members interested," he said. "If people complete the training and then there is nothing else to do, they will drift away and find other interests."

In early 2011 the Marina Bay team will conduct a joint three-hour exercise with the nearby Richmond Annex team to test their skills in an actual (simulated) disaster to see how well they can work with a team from another neighborhood.

The CERT classes are expected to start again after the first of the year. Any Marina Bay neighborhood resident who is interested in more information can visit the Office of Emergency Services web page at <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=339> or go to the city's website, click on the Public Safety tab at the top of the page, then click on Office of Emergency Services tab, then select "REACT/CERT." You can register online on that page for the next CERT class.

Tai reminds people that when a major disaster happens, it's likely that electricity, gas and water service will be interrupted. "Everyone, whether a member of a CERT team or not, should have enough water and food on hand to survive for 5-7 days," said Tai. "Remember, without electricity stores cannot sell anything, gas stations can't pump gas and ATM machines won't work." The American Red Cross offers a free one-hour class that focuses on personal disaster preparedness and what you should have on hand.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Marina Bay CERT team and how you can become involved is invited to attend one of the team's monthly meetings. For more information call Jim Mallory, the team training instructor, at 510-812-3647 or e-mail him at reactguy@yahoo.com. Mallory can also provide more information on the free American Red Cross personal disaster preparedness class.

Other helpful websites include those of the aforementioned USGS, www.usgs.gov, and ABAG, www.abag.ca.gov.