THE NEIGHBORHOOD EMERGENCY NETWORK

A PUBLIC SAFETY PARTNERSHIP FOR LEXINGTON - FAYETTE COUNTY

Disasters: They can happen anywhere, anytime, and they can happen to us.

And while we can't always prevent them, we can work together and take steps now to be ready. That's why the Fayette County Neighborhood Council and the Division of Environmental and Emergency Management (DEEM) are teaming up to sponsor the *Neighborhood Emergency Network (NET)*. It's a volunteer program to prepare our citizens and to help make our community a safer place.

NEIGHBOR HELPING NEIGHBOR

This program is based on the common sense notion of *neighbor helping neighbor*. Serious emergencies occur in Kentucky all the time, such as tornadoes, thunderstorms, winter storms, floods, and earthquakes. There are also man-made threats, including fires, chemical spills, and even terrorism. All of these can cause extensive damage, injuries, and loss of life.

When disaster threatens, we depend on police, fire, E.M.S. and other responders for help. But sometimes, disasters also force us to be self-sufficient. When this happens, it's often our neighbors, family, and co-workers who we rely on.

And most importantly, when we see someone in danger, our first instinct is to help. All this means that each of us needs to be prepared and know what to do in case of an emergency. And because we know our neighborhoods best, each of us has an important role to play in keeping them safe.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR PREPAREDNESS

The goal of the *Neighborhood Emergency Network* is to make our community safer through strong partnerships between neighborhoods and the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG). It's a great way to volunteer and a valuable resource for police, fire, and other emergency responders. The program focuses on three main activities:

- **Creating a communications network** between neighborhoods and public safety officials for use during emergencies.
- **Surveying each neighborhood** to identify potential hazards, unique expertise and resources, and residents who may have special needs during disasters.
- **Training volunteers and neighborhood associations** in emergency preparedness, prevention, and basic life saving skills.

It's important to note that neighborhoods or residents are not required to participate. Those that do join the network are free to do some, all, or none of these activities. What matters is that citizens have a chance to join the effort.

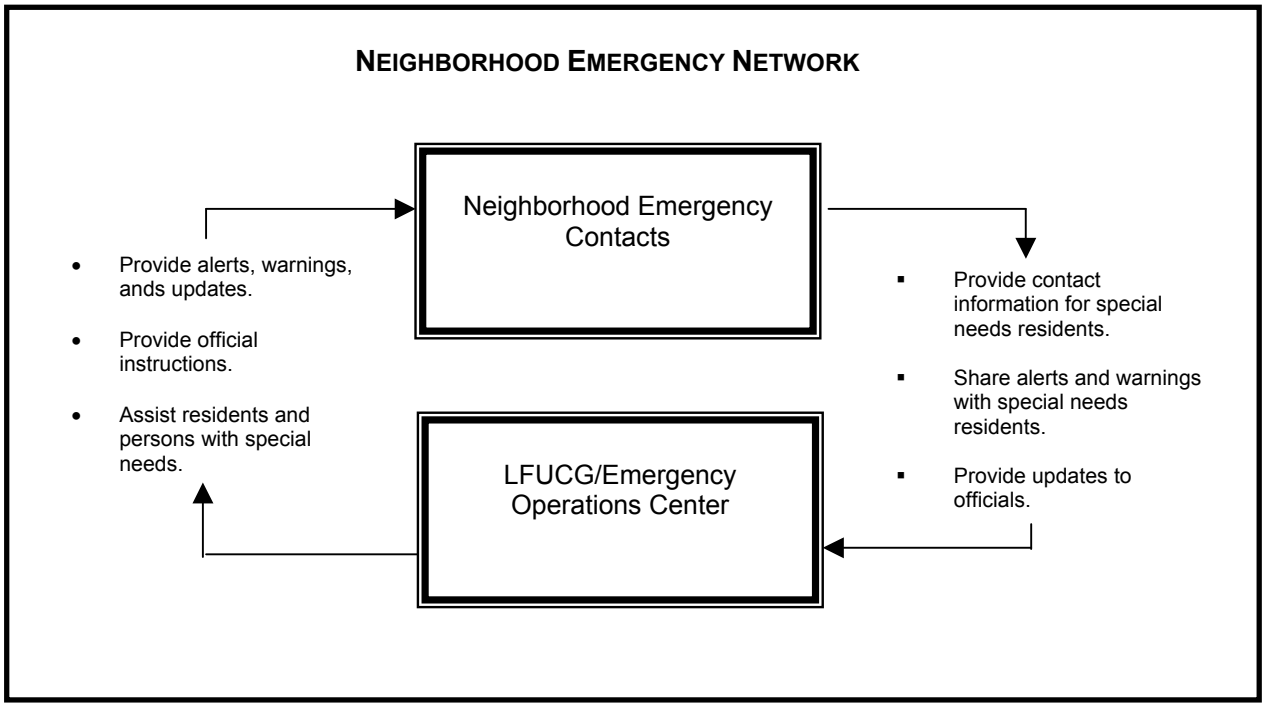
A Network For Response

To protect you and your family in an emergency, you need official information that's both timely and accurate. Likewise, it's also critical that officials hear from you in these situations. It helps responders better know where and who needs help the most.

Disaster information (both to and from the public) is usually relayed through television, radio, outdoor sirens, and so on. By setting up the *Neighborhood Emergency Network*, the LFUCG has another way to issue alerts, warnings, and special instructions. At the same time, citizens have another way to reach officials directly.

As part of the network, each neighborhood designates three emergency contacts, who can assist officials by:

- **Collecting contact information** from residents who may have special needs during disasters. These can include persons with disabilities, medical conditions, language differences, etc. With this knowledge, officials can make a special effort to assist them, such as helping dialysis patients during snowstorms.
- **Serving as "warning points"** for each neighborhood. During disasters, officials may call contacts with updates and special instructions. Contacts, in turn, share this information with other residents, especially those with special needs.
- **Providing status reports** to officials. Emergency contacts may be asked to help the LFUCG better understand the "big picture" of what's going on and what they need. Officials can then use these reports to offer assistance more efficiently.



WHERE HELP IS JUST NEXT DOOR

Fayette County is fortunate. We have over six hundred police officers, firefighters, and E.M.S. personnel on the job everyday protecting the public. But when disasters strike, even the best-prepared communities need help. Some help comes from state and federal government.

But most assistance comes from our own backyards—by neighbors lending a hand, by charities giving what they can, and by volunteers rolling up their sleeves. That's why, through the *Neighborhood Emergency Network*, citizens are teaming up with public safety agencies to prepare for such events. And one way we're doing this is by conducting surveys of participating neighborhoods. This includes:

- **Doing an inventory** of neighbors with unique skills and expertise, such as police officers, doctors, nurses, constructions workers, heavy machine operators, etc., as well as special resources like 4x4 vehicles and facilities that could be used as shelters.

- **Identifying potential hazards,** including fires, flooding, chemical spills, and other risks and how to mitigate against them.

- **Gathering contact information** on residents who may have special needs during disasters as mentioned above. Note that this information is kept confidential and stored on a secure computer database at the Division of Police. It is only used for contacting residents in an emergency.

TRAINING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE

Another way the *Neighborhood Emergency Network* is helping is by training our citizens. Being safe in a disaster means knowing what actions are needed to protect yourself, your family, and possibly your neighbors. This can include first aid, weather spotting, fire safety, and home disaster preparedness.

Through this program, public safety agencies are offering training and workshops to interested neighborhoods and residents, including:

- **Public forums** in which local officials update residents on what's being done to prepare for both natural and man-made emergencies, as well as answer questions and receive public input.

- **Safety Workshops** conducted by local experts. Possible topics include first aid, weather spotting, fire prevention and safety, workplace safety, contingency planning, crime prevention, and other safety issues that neighborhoods are interested in.

- **Advanced training and exercises** providing residents with essential lifesaving skills and familiarity with emergency operations in Fayette County.

LOOKING AHEAD: COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS

For those citizens that want to take their training to the next level, the *Neighborhood Emergency Network* will help associations, residents, and businesses organize Community Emergency Response Teams, which are part of President Bush's *Citizen Corps* national volunteer program.

Becoming part of a CERT will teach you skills like disaster preparedness, fire suppression, basic disaster medical operations, light search and rescue, disaster psychology and team organization. This training will make you better prepared to take care of yourself and others in times of crisis.

Once trained, CERT members may be called on to offer critical support to first responders in emergencies, provide immediate assistance to victims, organize spontaneous volunteers at disaster sites, and collect information intelligence to support public safety agencies.

It's an exciting concept that's catching fire across the country. To see how other communities are starting CERTs, visit www.citizencorps.gov.

"Many ask, what can I do to help in our fight? The answer is simple…by making a commitment to service in our own communities…We'll ask state and local officials to create a new modern civil defense service similar to local volunteer fire departments, to respond to local emergencies when the manpower of governments is stretched thin."

- President George W. Bush

For Further Information

To learn more about the *Neighborhood Emergency Network* or to get involved, please contact:

Division of Environmental and Emergency Management
166 North Martin Luther King Blvd.
Lexington, Kentucky 40507

Telephone: (859) 258-3784
Fax: (859) 252-8689
Web: WWW.LFUCG.COM/DEEM

Fayette County Neighborhood Association
C/O Emma Tibbs
2184 Tabago Court
Lexington, Kentucky 40509

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Neighborhood Emergency Network?

A volunteer program sponsored by the Fayette County Neighborhood Council and the Division of Environmental and Emergency Management (DEEM). The purpose is to enhance community preparedness and emergency response by developing a unique partnership between neighborhoods and public safety agencies.

What would this network do?

The program is sponsored by the LFUCG and those neighborhoods and residents that wish to participate. Through this initiative, the community is developing a communications network between public safety officials and participating neigborhoods for use during serious emergencies. In addition, the program seeks to provide residents with opportunities for training and education on emergency preparedness.

Why does Fayette County Need this network?

There are three reasons. First, serious emergencies occur in Kentucky each year, including a variety of natural and man-made threats, which can cause extensive damage and injuries. Second, residents need to be prepared for disasters and know how to stay safe. Third, because they know their neighborhoods best, residents can (and should) play a vital role during emergencies.

What are the benefits of this initiative?

There are three main benefits. First, it helps enhance community preparedness and public safety in Fayette County. Second, it provides another link between the LFUCG and neighborhoods. Third, it could potentially be an important resource for emergency responders.

Does this program replace Police, Fire, E.M.S., etc.?

No. Fayette County is fortunate to have over six hundred emergency responders on the job each day. They have the training and expertise necessary to respond to any disaster. The *Neighborhood Emergency Network*, similar to the Citizen's Police Academy, Neighborhood Watch, and other such programs, is in addition to public safety agencies and provides a way for citizens to contribute to their own safety.

Would participation cost me (or my neighborhood) anything?

No. This program is free and open to the public and builds on existing programs and resources. The only cost for citizens would be the time they spend. One exception could be fees for specialized training offered by other agencies as part of this effort.

Am I (or my Neighborhood Association) required to be in this program?

No. This is strictly a volunteer program. No person is required to participate. By agreeing to participate, neighborhood associations or other organizations do not legally commit themselves to performing any activities.

Am I required to give information to DEEM?

No. This is a volunteer program. Information provided by residents and neighborhoods is strictly voluntary.

Will my information be given away or used for other things by the government?

No. All information provided will be confidential and stored on a secure computer database at the Division of Police. It will only be used by the LFUCG for disaster preparedness and response.

What will my information be used for in an emergency?

Designated emergency contacts from each participating neighborhood may be sent updates or special instructions, which they would then try to share with their neighbors. In the case of residents with special needs during disasters, public safety officials may call them to see if they are safe or target them for special assistance. For example, officials may need to help dialysis patients who may become trapped during snowstorms. By knowing the locations of many persons with special needs, government can provide assistance quicker.

How would neighborhoods receive information through this network?

Normally, emergency information is provided through television, radio, and outdoor warning sirens. Through this network, designated contacts in each neighborhood may be called using the LFUCG's automated telephone system or directly by government employees. This is also true of persons with special disaster needs.

Will the emergency information received through the Network replace how I get it now?

No. All residents are encouraged to listen for official updates and instructions issued on television, radio, and outdoor sirens. The LFUCG also encourages residents to have NOAA weather radios and battery-powered radios. Information provided through the *Neighborhood Emergency Network* will duplicate and compliment the information received through normal sources.

If this information is the same, what use is the Network?

First, the program will provide a quick, direct way for the LFUCG to contact each neighborhood using an automated telephone system called "CityWatch." If necessary, these contacts may receive updates and special instructions. Second, it is also important that emergency information be provided to residents with special needs. Third, contacts in each neighborhood may function as the county's volunteer "eyes and ears" on the ground, similar to weather spotters.

What do Emergency Contacts have to do?

As volunteers, designated emergency contacts in each neighborhood are not legally required to do anything. Some of the activities that they may choose to do, however, include collecting information from residents with special disaster needs. They can serve as "warning points" for their neighborhoods, share information with other residents, and provide updates to officials. They may also help to organize "Community Emergency Response Teams" (CERTs).

How much time will I spend being a Neighborhood Contact?

As little or as much as you can. Contacts may conduct surveys of their neighborhoods once a year and collect information from residents with special disaster needs. In addition, contacts may also be active during serious emergencies impacting their area or the entire county (typically, the LFUCG is forced to activate its emergency operations center about once every two years). Finally, contacts may choose to participate in various training and exercises conducted by the LFUCG.

As a Neighborhood Contact, would I be liable for the safety of my neighbors?

No. This is a volunteer program used primarily during disasters and does not replace public safety agencies or relief agencies (the same is true for Neighborhood Watch programs, for example). These agencies should always be called immediately during any life-threatening emergency. The *Neighborhood Emergency Network* simply provides opportunities for associations and residents to better prepare themselves for disasters.

Would my neighborhood association be liable for the safety of my neighbors?

No. Again, this is a volunteer program used primarily during disasters and does not replace public safety agencies or relief agencies. Residents and associations simply provide additional services that support the official efforts of the government.

What is the difference between "Emergency Contacts" and "CERTs"?

Contacts volunteer to assist officials by providing information during emergencies and sharing updates and instructions with other residents (especially persons with special disaster needs). Some neighborhoods may also be interested in forming "Community Emergency Response Teams" (CERTs), which possess basic lifesaving and decision-making skills and may support emergency personnel if called upon.

As a volunteer or CERT team member, will I be legally liable if I use my lifesaving skills to help someone?

KRS 411.148 provides for non-liability for licensed persons or certified persons when assisting someone in an emergency situation. KRS 411.200 provides for civil immunity for volunteers acting in good faith within the scope of their duties. The Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 also provides similar protections from civil liability (Title 42, U.S.C. § 14501, et. seq).

However, you should always exercise caution when helping someone, especially if you may also be in danger. Further, you should only perform life saving measures (like first aid) if you have proper training or certification (if necessary).

Does my neighborhood need a whole team of volunteers?

No. As with any volunteer effort, it is usually best to start small with one or two designated contacts who can help officials by gathering and perhaps disseminating information during emergencies. Later on, neighborhoods may choose to participate in other ways, such as conducting surveys or sponsoring training.

This program seems challenging and time consuming. Will I have time to participate?

Yes. Of course, all of us are very busy and this program includes several different activities. That's why we stress that each volunteer and neighborhood association only do what they can. This may be as easy as designating your association president as the emergency contact for your neighborhood. Or it can include one or more other activities, like conducting workshops and public forums, neighborhood surveys, and so on. *Best of all, if each of us does something small, the total effort will be immense!*