

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INFORMATION

30940 HAWTHORNE BOULEVARD, RANCHO PALOS VERDES, CA 90275  
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### LOCAL GROUPS ALREADY IN PLACE

#### WHO ARE OUR FIRST RESPONDERS?

When the City of Rancho Palos Verdes was founded in 1973, it was incorporated as a contract city. As such, we maintain a very small permanent staff (only 45 full-time employees for a population of approximately 41,000 residents) and contract with a variety of private firms and other governmental agencies to provide the majority of local services to our residents. Examples of contracted services include trash collection, roadway repairs, park maintenance, building and safety inspections and animal control. We also contract with Los Angeles County to provide our local law enforcement, public safety, and health services. Therefore, during a disaster or emergency, our "local first responders" are the Los Angeles County Sheriff, Fire and Health Departments. By contracting with the County for these services, we are able to tap into a much larger pool of resources and expertise than we would otherwise be able to provide on our own.

For example, the Lomita Sheriff's Station maintains and updates a list of our critical facilities and pharmaceutical distribution sites. There are a total



of 23 identified critical facilities in our region that are checked by the Sheriff's Department on each shift, every day. In addition, we have a four member community-based policing team, know as the CORE Team, that has taken a very active roll in local school safety. The CORE Team has prepared Safety and Disaster Plans for each school site and team members participate in their respective school's disaster drills.

#### LOCAL CITIZEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE GROUPS

In addition to the impressive emergency resources provided by the County, the City is very fortunate to have several volunteer civilian response teams that assist our first responders and our community during an emergency or disaster.

## PENINSULA EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (PERT)

The Peninsula Emergency Response Team or "PERT" is a group of volunteer Peninsula residents trained to assist their families, neighbors and community in the event of any disaster. PERT currently has 80 members and is used to supplement the efforts of law enforcement, fire and other emergency response teams during disasters such as earthquakes, fires, severe weather and terrorist attacks. The members are trained in the areas of fire suppression, search and rescue, first aid and CPR, utility control, disaster medicine and hazardous materials. Acting as individuals first, then later as members of teams, trained PERT volunteers can fan out within their particular area, extinguishing small fires, turning off natural gas and water inlets to damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic first aid. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential work force to service organizations in non-hazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control and evacuation. In March 2003, PERT will embark on additional training provided by the American Red Cross to enhance their skills. The courses will include disaster services, shelter operations and mass triage.

## DISASTER COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE (DCS)

The Los Angeles County Disaster Communications Service or "DCS" is a volunteer organization that uses amateur ham radio to provide backup communications in case of telephone failure to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. The DCS at the Lomita Sheriff's Station is very active with 114 members, all of whom are registered with the County as official communications specialists. In addition to maintaining permanent radio facilities at the Lomita Station, the DCS has a back up radio station



located at Rancho Palos Verdes City Hall. The DCS members use this equipment to provide backup communications to all areas of Rancho Palos Verdes, the Lomita Sheriff's station, and the Palos Verdes Unified School District school sites. Last year, the DCS also began joint training efforts with PERT, so that when a PERT team goes into the field, a DCS member accompanies them to provide a vital communication link between the various teams and the Lomita Station.

## EQUESTRIAN RESPONSE TEAM (ERT)

The newest volunteer emergency response team on the Palos Verdes Peninsula is a certified unit of the Los Angeles County Equine Response Team or "ERT." This group is trained to conduct emergency rescue and evacuation for the many horses that are kept on the Peninsula. Five of 18 Peninsula area members have completed all three levels of training conducted in Agoura Hills and two local ERT members have been appointed to the ERT Core Team, which directs the group's operations countywide. Local training classes on the Peninsula are scheduled to begin during the first week of March 2003.

If you are interested in joining any of these organizations, contact Sgt. Dave Rozas, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for the

Lomita Sheriff's Station, at (310) 891-3227, FAX (323) 415-3098, or e-mail dtrozas@lasd.org.

## CITY TASK FORCE

One of the City's primary responsibilities to its citizens is to provide for the maximum protection of life and property from both natural and man-made hazards and disasters. Last year, the City Council unanimously approved the creation of a new Emergency Preparedness Task Force with this goal in mind. This new City advisory board, which consists of fifteen resident volunteers appointed by the City Council, has been charged with the responsibility of advising the City on ways to improve its programs and resources in order to be able to effectively respond to a wide variety of emergency and disaster situations. The Task Force, which has been meeting monthly since last September, is preparing recommendations for forging new and strengthening existing ties with organizations such as the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and our local volunteer response groups. The Task Force is also proposing programs to communicate with and educate residents about disaster and emergency preparedness. Their recommendations are scheduled to be presented to the City Council in April 2003.

# TERRORISM: WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE

## KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO SURVIVE AND PROTECT YOURSELF AND LOVED ONES

The devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have left many Americans concerned about the possibility of future incidents in the United States and their potential impact. The level of speculation increased when President Bush raised the national terror threat level to Orange status on February 7, 2003, signifying a high risk of terrorist attacks. Although the likelihood of such an attack occurring in Rancho Palos Verdes is very low due to our lack of high profile targets, the potential exists in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Despite the current state of uncertainty, there are things you can do to prepare for the unexpected and reduce the stress that you may be feeling now and in the event that another domestic attack occurs in the future.

While there are many sources of information about the threat of terrorism and emergency preparedness, the American Red Cross provides one of the best sources for individuals and families. The information presented in this article is taken from the Red Cross' web site at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) and is also available at the Greater Long Beach Chapter of the American Red Cross located at 3150 East 29th Street, Long Beach, CA 90806, telephone (562) 595-6341.

### WHAT COULD HAPPEN

As we learned from the events of September 11, 2001, the following things can happen after a terrorist attack:

- There can be significant numbers of casualties and/or damage to buildings and the infrastructure, therefore, your employers need up-to-date information about any medical needs you may have



and on how to contact your designated beneficiaries.

- Because of the criminal nature of the event, heavy law enforcement involvement at local, state and federal levels follows a terrorist attack .
- Health and mental health resources in the affected communities can be strained to their limits, maybe even overwhelmed.
- Extensive media coverage, strong public fear and international implications and consequences can

continue for a prolonged period.

- Workplaces and schools may be closed, and there may be restrictions on domestic and international travel.
- You and your family or household may have to evacuate an area, avoiding roads blocked for your safety.
- Clean up may take many months.

### WHERE TO START

Finding out what can happen is the first step. Once you have determined possible

events and their potential for happening in your community, it is important that you discuss them with your family or household and develop a disaster plan together.

### CREATE AN EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN.

Choose an out-of-town contact your family or household will call or e-mail to check on each other should a disaster occur. Your selected contact should live far enough away that they would be

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unlikely to be directly affected by the same event, and they should know they are the chosen contact. Make sure every household member has that contact, and each other's e-mail addresses and telephone numbers (home, work, pager and cell). Leave these contact numbers at your children's schools and at your workplace. Your family should know that if telephones are out, they need to be patient and try again later or try e-mail. Telephone lines are flooded when emergencies happen but e-mail can sometimes get through.

### ESTABLISH A "SAFE ROOM" AND A MEETING PLACE

Select a "safe-room" in your home where everyone can gather. The best choice is an interior room above ground with few windows and doors.

Having a predetermined meeting place away from your home will save time and minimize confusion should your home be affected or the area evacuated. You may even want to make arrangements to stay with a family member or friend. Be sure to include any pets in these plans, since pets are not permitted in shelters and some hotels will not accept them.

### ASSEMBLE A DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

All of us should be able to survive comfortably on our own for at least a three-day period. That is the length of time you may need to remain in your home until the danger from a biological, chemical or radiological attack has passed. The basics you will need are:

- A change of clothes for each family member
- Sleeping bags or blankets
- Food and water. A gallon of water per person per day should be enough. Canned and dried foods are easy to store and prepare.
- Flashlight

- Battery-powered radio
- Extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Prescription medicines
- Toilet articles
- Duct tape and heavy-duty plastic garbage bags can be used to seal windows and doors.

If you are asked to "shelter in place" or need to evacuate your home, having these essential supplies on hand will make you and your family more comfortable. Prepare a disaster supply kit in an easy-to-carry container such as a duffel bag or small plastic trash can. It is also a good idea to include some cash and copies of important family documents (birth certificates, passports and licenses) in your kit. Make sure all household members know where the kit is kept. You should also consider bringing a disaster supply kit to work or leaving one in your car.

Copies of essential documents such as power of attorney, birth and marriage certificates, insurance policies, life insurance beneficiary designations and a copy of your will, should also be kept in a safe location outside your home. A safe deposit box or the home of a friend or family member who lives out of town is a good choice.

### CHECK ON THE SCHOOL EMERGENCY PLAN FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

You need to know if the school will keep children at school until a parent or designated adult can pick them up or if they will be sent home on their own. Be sure that the school has updated information about how to reach parents and responsible caregivers to arrange for pickup. Find out what type of authorization the school may require to release a child to someone you designate. The school should have this information on hand because during times of emergency the school telephones will be overwhelmed with calls.

### LEARN FIRST AID

Another useful preparation includes learning some basic first aid. To enroll in a first aid and CPR course, contact your local American Red Cross chapter. In an emergency situation, you need to tend to your own well being first and then consider first aid for others around you, including possibly assisting injured people to evacuating a building.

### IF DISASTER STRIKES

- Remain calm and be patient.
- Listen to your radio or television for news and instructions.
- Follow the advice of County and local emergency officials.
- If the disaster occurs near you, check for injuries. Give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
- Because emergency services will be overwhelmed, call 9-1-1 about life-threatening emergencies only.
- If the disaster occurs near your home while you are there, check for damage using a flashlight. Do not light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches. Check for fires, fire hazards and other household hazards. Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, and get everyone outside quickly.
- Shut off any other damaged utilities.
- Confine or secure your pets.
- Call your family contact—again, do not use the telephone unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or disabled.

### LISTEN TO EMERGENCY AUTHORITIES

County and local authorities will provide you with the most accurate

information specific to an event in your area. Keep in mind, however, that raw, unedited footage of terrorism can be very upsetting, especially to children. It is inadvisable to allow children watch television reports about such events, especially if the reports show the same images over and over again. Young children do not realize that it is repeated footage; they think the event is happening again and again. Adults may also need to give themselves a break from watching disturbing footage. You may want to make some arrangements to take turns listening to the news with other adult members of your household.

## EVACUATION

If County or local authorities ask you to leave your home, they have a good reason to make this request, and you should heed the advice immediately. Listen to your radio or television and follow the instructions of emergency officials and keep these simple tips in mind:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and sturdy shoes so you can be protected as much as possible.
- Take your disaster supplies kit.
- Take your pets with you; do not leave them behind. Because pets

are not permitted in public shelters, follow your plan to go to a relative or friend's home, or find a pet-friendly hotel.

- Lock your home.
- Use travel routes specified by emergency authorities. Do not use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
- Stay away from downed power lines.

If you have enough time:

- Call your family contact to tell them where you are going and when you expect to arrive.
- Shut off water and electricity before leaving, if instructed to do so. Leave natural gas service ON unless local officials advise you otherwise. You may need gas for heating and cooking, and only a professional can restore gas service in your home once it's been turned off. In a disaster situation it could take weeks for a professional to respond.

## SHELTER-IN-PLACE: STAY WHERE YOU ARE

If you are advised by County or local officials to shelter in place, what they mean is for you to remain inside your home or office and protect yourself there. Close and lock all windows and exterior doors.

Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems. Close the fireplace damper. Get your disaster supply kit, and make sure your battery radio is working. Go to your safe room that is above ground level. In the case of a chemical threat, an above ground location is preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air, and may seep into basements even if the windows are closed. Using duct tape, seal all cracks around the door, windows and any vents into the room. Keep listening to your radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate. County or local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT BIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL OR RADIOLOGICAL AGENTS

People who may have come into contact with a biological, chemical or radiological agent may need to go through a decontamination procedure and receive medical attention. For more information about the specific effects of chemical, biological or radiological agents, the following web sites may be helpful:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov)

U.S. Department of Energy: [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov/swercepp](http://www.epa.gov/swercepp)



# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHEMICAL & BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM



Since the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Henry L. Stimson Center's Chemical and Biological Weapons Nonproliferation Project has received numerous inquiries from citizens and the media about how individuals could protect themselves in the event of a chemical or biological disaster. Such questions are understandable given concerns about subsequent attacks on U.S. soil, so the project's director, Amy E. Smithson, Ph.D. answers below the most frequently asked questions. Her answers are based on extensive interviews with hazardous materials firefighters, physicians, public health officials, chemical and biological weapons experts, and others who have lengthy experience with chemical and biological defense precautions and who have dealt first-hand with chemical accidents and disease outbreaks. She wishes to underscore, however, that she is not a physician.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT A POISON GAS ATTACK (OR A CHEMICAL ACCIDENT) MIGHT BE TAKING PLACE?

One of the many unsettling characteristics of chemical agents is that

some of them cannot be seen or smelled. Citizens can protect themselves by observing the following rule of thumb: If a single person is on the ground, choking or seizing, it is likely this individual is having a heart attack or some sort of seizure. However, if several people are down, coughing, vomiting, or seizing, they could be reacting to the presence of a toxic substance. Evacuate the area immediately and dial

911, making sure to tell the dispatcher that a hazardous gas may be present.

### INDOORS

If indoors, exit the building as rapidly as possible. Once outside, if you believe that you may have been exposed to the toxic substance, discarding your modesty and shedding your clothes could save your life. Taking off your outer clothing can remove roughly 80 percent of the contamination hazard. Look for a nearby fountain, pool, or other source of water so that you can quickly and thoroughly rinse any skin that may have been exposed (e.g., jump in the pool). Studies show that water alone is an effective decontaminant. Rescuers will arrive within minutes, and firefighters will hook up hoses and spray everyone to decontaminate them. Try to remain calm. Rescuers will triage everyone so that they can give medical attention to the most seriously affected individuals first. Even if you are showing no symptoms of exposure (e.g., eye problems), paramedics and

physicians on scene will want to give you a check-up and advise you about follow-up care. Police officers will also want to speak with you about what you may have observed that could help them catch the individual(s) responsible.

### OUTDOORS

Birds and other small animals would very quickly be overcome by a poison gas, so if birds are dropping from the sky, that is another warning sign of toxic trouble. The most important thing to do is to get a physical barrier between you and the toxic cloud. Get indoors quickly—preferably into a building, but even being inside a car will help. Shut all windows and doors and



turn off the air conditioner. Try to plug any air drafts (e.g., under doors). This technique is known as sheltering in place. Call 911 and notify authorities that a hazardous gas may be present. If that is indeed the case, the wind will carry the toxic hazard away within a relatively short period of time. Stay indoors, and turn on the television and/or radio for news and announcements. Authorities will notify you when it is safe to go outside. If you are at home, put your clothes in a plastic bag and take a shower, which will help remove any contamination that might have occurred before you were able to get indoors.

## SHOULD CITIZENS BUY GAS MASKS?

The chances that terrorists will turn to poisonous substances instead of conventional bombs are very, very remote. However, if it makes you feel better to purchase a gas mask, by all means, go ahead. Please make sure that you are properly fitted—a loose gas mask defeats the purpose. Also, please ensure that you are properly instructed in the use of the mask.

Personally, I do not carry a gas mask with me. I take the subway to and from work daily, and I continue to go to meetings and other events in large buildings.

Note also that the only nation that has ever issued gas masks to all of its citizens is the state of Israel.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A BIOLOGICAL ATTACK?

By now, the media has repeatedly broadcast that biological agents can be dispersed from commercial sprayers, such as crop dusters. Often omitted from these reports is the fact that, among other complications, commercial equipment would have to be modified for such an attack strategy to have a chance of success.

Still, crop dusters are out of place over cities, and the FBI has already placed restrictions about where they can fly. Were I to see one over a metropolitan area, I would immediately go indoors, shut all windows and doors, turn off the air conditioner, and notify authorities. The same would hold true for any other unusual spraying activities. For instance, a person tending a rooftop garden would not raise my suspicions, but an individual deliberately spraying a substance from a rooftop, or a truck dispersing a misty substance through side vents, would.

Keep in mind that occasionally local authorities employ helicopters and other means to spray approved

pesticides to control mosquitoes and other pests. Officially sanctioned spraying activities are announced well in advance, repeatedly. A call to local authorities can confirm whether any spraying that you might observe would fall into that category.

## WHAT CAN CITIZENS DO TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM A POSSIBLE BIOLOGICAL DISASTER?

Frankly, it may not be apparent that a biological agent has been dispersed until people begin falling ill several days later. For most biological agents, the initial symptoms would resemble a flu-like malaise. Across the nation, local, state, and federal authorities are putting capabilities in place to improve the ability to detect abnormal public health problems rapidly—to distinguish between multiple cases of the flu or a possible biological agent attack.

During the normal cold and flu season, please do not jump to the conclusion that you have been infected with a biowarfare agent if you begin to feel achy or have the sniffles. In fact, people catch colds throughout the year. You are more likely to get hit by lightning than to be the victim of a bioterrorist attack.

If, however, you hear reports that a biological agent may have just been released, stay indoors or get indoors right away, shut all windows and doors, and turn off the air conditioning system. The most worrisome method of biological agent dissemination is aerosol dispersal. For a biowarfare aerosol to make you ill, microscopic particles must find their way into your lungs. Therefore, putting a physical barrier in between you and a possible aerosol cloud is a key self-protection step.

Of course, a gas mask can provide excellent respiratory protection. Alternately, a surgical mask or one of the respiratory protection masks recommended for various

construction and laboratory tasks would help to screen out particulate matter that might be in the air. To protect your airway, masks need to be fitted snugly over the mouth and nose.

The Army Handbook on Medical Management of Biological Casualties recommends that medical personnel attending patients infected with most biowarfare agents employ what is known as “standard precautions.” This term essentially means wearing a surgical mask and gloves. Standard precautions are effective against anthrax, brucellosis, Q fever, tularemia, viral encephalitis, botulinum toxin, and Staphylococcal enterotoxin b.

## SHOULD CITIZENS STOCKPILE ANTIBIOTICS?

NO. Keeping a stockpile of antibiotics is, in short, a bad idea. While antibiotics would be used to treat individuals who might fall ill during a disease outbreak, the use of these medications should always be done at the direction of a physician. People who self-medicate themselves or their children could very well do more harm than good. Overuse of antibiotics, as well as their misuse (to treat illnesses such as colds), is harmful as it reduces the ability of these drugs to work in serious health emergencies.

The US government keeps a cache of antibiotics and other medical supplies that can arrive in an area in which an outbreak has occurred within 12 hours.

## WHAT PRECAUTIONS CAN CITIZENS TAKE WITH THEIR WATER SUPPLY?

Poisoning of a city’s water supply is much more easily said than done. However, citizens can protect themselves by boiling their drinking water, which will kill any microorganisms that may have survived the municipal filtration systems. Another option is to use a personal water filtration system.

## THINKING ABOUT BUYING GAS MASKS?

In general, purchasing a gas mask is not a guarantee of protection against the wide range of chemical and biological agents that could be used in an attack. Citizens purchasing gas masks (either new or used) may only provide themselves with a false sense of security and misuse of a gas mask may actually kill people.

1. To provide protection, any gas mask must be able to filter out the particular chemical or biological agent used in an attack.
2. Different chemicals require different filters. There is no "silver bullet" filter that works for all chemicals and germs. Many filters have a fixed shelf life and must be replaced periodically.
3. For full protection, the owner of a gas mask would need a wide assortment of different filters.
4. Even if the user has the necessary assortment of filters, could they recognize the chemical or biological agent in time to insert the correct filter. (Consider that some agents are odorless and colorless.)
5. Even with the correct filter to protect the lungs, some chemical agents can also enter the body through the skin. Protection against these type of agents also requires the use of special protective clothing.
6. Purchasers of gas masks must be trained and "fit" tested for full protection.
7. Surplus gas masks are "surplus" for a reason, often they too old to be considered safe. Surplus filters may be ineffective in stopping some agents. For training purposes, the Armed Forces sometimes use "Training" filters, which provide NO actual protection at all.
8. For maximum effect, the user would have to carry a gas mask with them at all times.
9. In many cases, it would be difficult to know that a biological attack is taking place. It would be difficult to get the mask on in time to do any good.



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This special supplement to the Newsletter was prepared by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes to educate and empower our residents during these uncertain times. Please keep it for reference and share the information with your family and friends. Additional copies of this supplement are available at City Hall and at City parks.

Photos: L.A. County Fire Dept. Website and FEMA Website.

## EQUINE RESPONSE TEAM

### SEEKING VOLUNTEERS WITH LIVESTOCK/EQUINE EXPERIENCE

The Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care & Control (LACDACC) has an Equine Response Team to assist with the safe evacuation of livestock during large and small-scale disasters. This is a volunteer group that was formed to address the concern of evacuating horses from an area in the event of a fire or some other disaster. Members of the response team are required to complete over fifty hours of training sessions and drills that cover disaster management procedures, fire safety and disaster psychology, first aid, emergency trailer loading techniques and vehicle operation.

The Equine Response Team looking for Peninsula residents who are committed to equine rescue and safety. This response team has been holding training classes since March 2000 in the Agoura/Malibu area, and has over 70 volunteer members. The training is now available in the South Bay area. For further information or questions contact:

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