How to Organize Your Neighborhood

March 21, 2026

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SOUTH SKYLINE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ORGANIZATION

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What is a Neighborhood?

A “neighborhood” is defined as groups of homes and residents that are in close proximity to each other or are characterized by other factors that lead to a formation of a “local group”.

There are different types of Neighborhoods.

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Step 1: Consensus

A Neighborhood is not an HOA!!!!
It's all about listening to everyone.
Identify socially connected neighbors and leverage their help.
Don't ignore a quiet minority.
Find out peoples' concerns – and address them.
Consensus is tedious.
There may not be one single right answer.
Patience!!!!

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Step 2: Neighborhood Leadership

First and Most Important, You MUST Identify Your Neighborhood and a

LEADER

A NEIGHBORHOOD COORDINATOR

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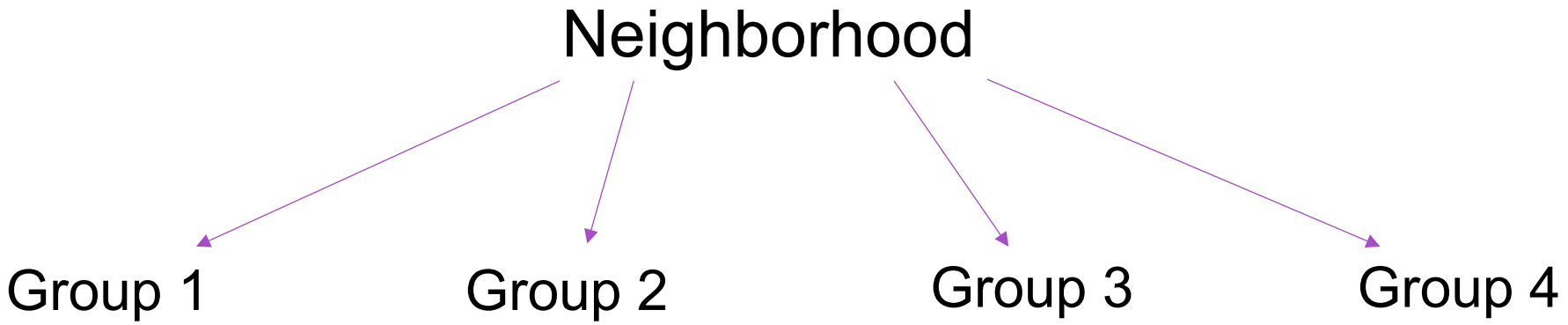
Step 3: Span of Control

Depending on the size of your community, adhere to Span of Control per the Incident Command Structure (ICS) --- no more than 6 – 8 residences per group or cluster. More than that and the span of control is too large to be effective.



Each Group or Cluster MUST have a Leader / Coordinator

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Step 4: Community Meeting

Hold a neighborhood meeting or contact each neighbor to discuss:

Need for an Emergency Preparedness Plan – Why do we need to do this?

Educate neighbors on types of disasters and how to be prepared for each: Family Disaster Plan, Emergency Go Kits, Be Prepared to Stay or to Leave, Evacuation Routes, etc.

All the information you need can be found at **www.SSEPO.org**

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Step 5: Develop a Neighborhood Emergency Communications Plan

That can reach EVERYONE in the NEIGHBORHOOD

No ONE method will work for everyone

People are scattered

Some are unwilling to participate

Some may have special needs

Must be simple enough for everyone to use

Bottom Line: Use What Works Best for Your Neighborhood and for Everyone In the Neighborhood. May Require Physically Going to Homes

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Communications Plan
Emergency Alert Apps

Make sure everyone has information about essential Emergency Apps and Websites:

- SMC Alert, CruzAware, AlertSCC
- Genasys Protect - Know Your Zone
- Watch Duty
- Smoke Point
- CalFire Incidents
- La Honda Fire Brigade

Details in handout

Communications Plan
Create a Neighborhood Directory

- A neighborhood list should include all individuals old enough to have their own cell phone - google docs work well
  - Don't forget about tenants
  - Update it annually - tenants move, houses get sold, family members come and go
  - Build strong consensus on privacy and how the information is used.
  - Key use cases: Evacuate NOW!!!!, Who is still missing after a catastrophe?, Crucial updates for all residents.
  - This drives both neighborhood email lists and text lists.
  - Contents:
    - Phone numbers / Text Messages?
    - Address
    - E-mail
    - Pets / Farm Animals
    - Gate Codes
    - Special Needs
    - Special Skills / Equipment: CERT, Ham Operator, Medical Personnel, AED, Tractors, Chain Saws, etc

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Communications Plan
Regional & Neighborhood Email

Internet Blast Through Email

Join Regional Email Groups: La Honda Google Group, South Skyline Groups.io, 95033 Groups.io, Pescadero Next Door

Create a Private Email Group for your specific Neighborhood

- Regular Sharing of Neighborhood Concerns
- Emergency Alerts and Updates

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Emergency Communication: Internet vs Radio

Always think about plan A and plan B.

Most people are glued to their phones.

if you can make the phones work in an emergency, this is the logical plan A.
And if not that, what's your plan B? This is where radio comes in.
Plan C may be locating your neighbors in person.

Remember: No one left behind!!!!

Why Cell Phones?

- The Opportunity
  - Most people check text messages all the time. They don't check email very often. And a radio needs to be turned on first. Therefore, if it works, text messages are the quickest way to find everyone.
  - With technological advances, cell phones with internet are a viable emergency strategy. Will this work for you ?
- Challenges with Cell Phones
  - Few people in the mountains have decent Cell Service.
  - Cell phone towers only have batteries that last 24 hours.
  - Therefore, everything is on WiFi.
  - But, traditional Text Messages (SMS) are Cellular only.

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Cell Phone Lists – RCS

- New standard supported by Google and Apple - but it's just good old text messages.
- Allows large numbers of iPhones and Android devices on same list.
- Unlike SMS, Works with Wifi or Cellular.
- Requires relatively recent phones (IOS18+, Android 2.6+)
  - Careful about people with only a landline, or old cell phones.
  - You can persuade people to upgrade OS or get new cell phones. Patience.
- Someone needs to add all the cell phone numbers to the list.
- Never add an old cell phone to the list - it will break it - verify OS before adding!

Cell Phone Lists – WhatsApp

- Globally popular messaging app - works on any phone but requires internet - does not work with just a cellular connection.
- Users self-manage list membership.
- Not everyone in US uses it, so like email, people don't always check it.
- Some people worry about Meta's ownership of WhatsApp as potentially weakening its privacy - Meta's dealings with Chinese government don't inspire confidence.

Internet for Cell Phones

- Little buried fiber on the mountain.
- Internet via wires on poles (Comcast or ATT) risks:
  - Subject to physical damage to wires and poles (falling trees, landslides, fire) .
  - Battery failures during power outages.
- Radio based internet (Starlink, Microwave solutions like Etheric Networks)
  - Requires line of sight. Ridge tops better than underneath dense forest in a valley!
  - Extremely reliable in an emergency.
  - Ground stations/access points aggressively defended even in wildfires.
- Will This Work For You?
  - Does your neighborhood mostly have resilient internet?
  - Do people have generators to keep their internet connection running?
  - Can you take care of people not on the internet? (Older, less tech-savvy neighbors)
- **Don't be complacent. Have a Plan B. This is why radio is just as important.**

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Communications Plan
Radios for Intra- and Inter- Neighborhood Communications

1

Determine if MURS, FRS or GMRS Radios would be an effective method of communication in your neighborhood, when traditional communication methods fail.

2

Conduct testing to determine which kind of MURS / FRS / GMRS radio would be most effective in your neighborhood.

3

Identify HAM Radio operators in your community who can coordinate outside communications for getting emergency information and for requesting help when necessary

HAM Radio can be used to send TEXT Messages even when the Internet is NOT Available

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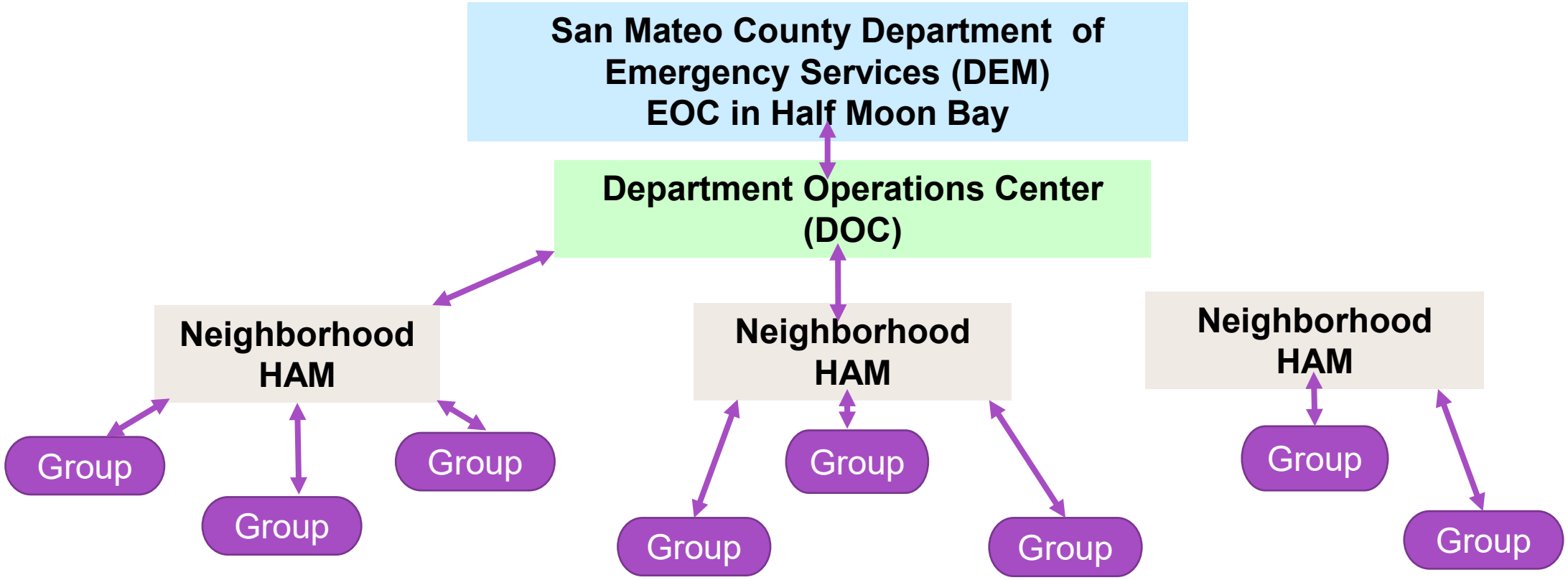
Radio Communications Plan



GMRS Radios

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What to Communicate During An Emergency or When You Are First On the Scene

CALL 911

Use Landline, if possible

No Landline or Cell Service, HAM Radio to the Rescue

- This is Priority Traffic

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WHAT DO YOU SAY?

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE SITUATION, ASSISTANCE NEEDED AND THE LOCATION

SPEAK CLEARLY – KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SAY BEFORE YOU SAY IT

GIVE COUNTY FIRST

WHAT IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR LOCATION?

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Lack of Cross Streets in Our Community

- First identify your COUNTY and general area “Hwy 84, Eastbound, East of La Honda”, or “West of Skyline”.

- Then give more specific information (Get this prior to making the call)

- Ask Siri
- iPhone 16+ Satellite SOS

- GPS Locator in your phone or car

- Use Your SSEPO Map

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Use Available Markers

Hwy 84 Addresses – 5350 equals
5.35 mile marker

Post Mile Markers – along every Hwy.
SM = San Mateo County, 84 = State Route 84
Post Mile 11.15

Call Boxes – every mile along Hwy 84, less frequent on other Hwys

MROSD – Open Space gates, another reference

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Training
Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

FOR YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, YOUR COMMUNITY

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
FIRE SUPPRESSION
MEDICAL FIRST AID AND STOP THE BLEED
LIGHT SEARCH & RESCUE
DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY

South Coast CERT
COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

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BE PREPARED

- FOR ANY KIND OF DISASTER
- HAVE YOUR "GO BAG" READY
- EVACUATION
- SHELTER IN PLACE

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Keep It Going

- Practice Radio and other forms of Communications
- Encourage neighbors to get CERT training
- Hold annual simulated emergency drills that include checking on every resident
- Regularly update the phone tree / contact list; include renters
- Consider becoming a Firewise Community

LET'S PRACTICE

BAOFENG UV-5R GMRS DUAL BAND RADIO

PTT

ON OFF VOLUME

MEMORY MR

BAND

CHANGE CHANNELS

LOCK

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BASIC GMRS RADIO PROCEDURES

- **HOLD RADIO TO THE SIDE OF YOUR FACE**
- **TALK ACROSS THE MIC**
- **ANTENNA STRAIGHT UP**
- **PUSH TO TALK BUTTON -- HOLD 1 SEC BEFORE SPEAKING & 1 SECOND AFTER SPEAKING**
- **TALK IN NORMAL VOICE WITH CLEAR ARTICULATION**
- **END TRANSMISSION WITH “OVER”**