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## Lamorinda teams assist in county-wide emergency drill

By Sora O'Doherty



Lamorinda CERT team prepares to participate in a Bay-Area-wide drill. Photo Sora O'Doherty

EOCs to provide rapid situational awareness to city and county officials prioritizing mass threats to life and major infrastructure failures. A windshield survey is a quick drive through an area, to identify immediately visible damage.

Thirty-four volunteers in Lamorinda participated, including this reporter, with 17 messages successfully received by the city EOC which was staffed by members of the Lamorinda Area Radio Interest Group (LARIG). No city officials were involved in this particular drill, and 11 messages were successfully sent to the County Emergency Operations Center using Fldigi, which is digital messages sent via radio frequencies. Fldigi does not require internet, so is particularly important for emergencies when internet service might not be available. The other six messages were triaged and considered not necessary to send to the county. According to Julie Luckenbach, CERT registrar and instructor, LARIG had uploaded and practiced Fldigi for this exercise and now has four to five strong users, which will be key in helping the EOC operate in a real disaster and communicate with the county.

Overall, the count for participants in all of Contra Costa County was around 346 people. A few smaller areas have not yet reported numbers. The interest created was way above expectations. CERT had only estimated 200-300 participants in the first year. CWS sent out 190 alerts, and Luckenbach reports that they received many new registrations because of the exercise, which is a huge success.

Like all drills, the teams conducted immediate "hotwashes," which are after-action discussions and evaluations of an agency's (or multiple agencies') performance following an exercise, training session, or major event. Luckenbach provided information from the Contra Costa County meeting. Although Lamorinda volunteers were proficient in Fldigi, the County didn't have theirs up and running in the first hour. Messages were delayed. Voice instead could have been used for backup. In addition, some of the equipment at the EOC did not have the correct cables or parts. Luckily, they had a few engineers who were able to make it all work. And field CERTs had equipment failures as well. Some dead spots were identified and volunteers found a need for more GMRS repeaters. GMRS are general mobile radio service radios that require a license from the Federal Communications Commission. GMRS radios can connect with local "repeaters" that strengthen the signals, thus giving GMRS users greater range than the local FRS, family radio service, radios. In Moraga, this reporter was part of a two-person incident command, but was hampered by discovering, as did several other CERT members, that radios were not fully programmed to be able to transmit on GMRS, but only to listen. This resulted in messages being received from CERT members who were assigned to search for damage in areas such as the Rheem Shopping Center and the Campolindo and Country Club neighborhoods, but IC was unable to acknowledge. Following the drill, volunteers were able to have their radios reprogrammed so that, in the event of a real emergency, they will be fully functional.

One of the takeaways from the exercise was a determination that everyone needs more training on being a scribe and reporting messages.

On Saturday, Nov. 16, as the Bay Area was rocked by a 7.0 earthquake, a gas station in Moraga fell into a sinkhole. Well, not really, but Lamorindans with active imaginations reported this and other casualties as part of a county-wide emergency drill. Members of Lamorinda CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) joined many other CERT organizations throughout Contra Costa County and partnered with the California Office of Emergency Services, the Contra Costa Sheriff's office and the County's Community Warning System to conduct an emergency communications exercise - Light Up The San Francisco Bay.

Early in the morning, volunteers were told that there had been an earthquake along the North Hayward Fault with the epicenter in the San Pablo Bay. Field CERT teams were directed to gather, conduct windshield surveys and/or fill out their local rapid needs assessment forms, and communicate simulated messages to their CERT division incident commands or directly to their

Reach the reporter at: [sora@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sora@lamorindaweekly.com)

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