

## **BIRCH BAY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TASK FORCE**

**3/20/2013**

The Task Force met at Station 63 of North Whatcom Fire and Rescue to further explore creating an emergency preparedness plan for Birch Bay as an unincorporated area of Whatcom County.

### **Present:**

Kathy Berg, Chair, Birch Bay Steering Committee  
Doralee Booth, Vice Chair, Birch Bay Steering Committee and Chair, Public Safety, Schools and Transportation Sub-Committee  
Ron Anderson, District Fire Chief, North Whatcom Fire and Rescue  
Henry Hollander, Division Chief, North Whatcom Fire and Rescue  
Mavis Dalzell, Partner Services Lead, Mt. Baker Chapter American Red Cross (ARC)  
Terry Terry, Emergency Management Coordinator, Lummi Island  
John Gargett, Past President, Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce; formerly with Whatcom County Emergency Management  
Dan Eisses, Birch Bay Water and Sewer District  
Ruth Higgins, former Task Force Leader (volunteer recording secretary)

### **Not Present:**

Ken Richardson, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, Division of Emergency Management  
Kent Catlin, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, Division of Emergency Management  
Michael Abendhoff, Government and Public Affairs, BP Refinery  
Iain Buchanan, Manager, Birch Bay Water Slides and Board Member, Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce  
Tim Theissen, Pastor, Birch Bay Bible Community Church  
Dean Crosswhite, Division Chief, Fire District 7

Members introduced themselves for the benefit of newcomers and briefly outlined their past experience or interest in the group's efforts.

Chief Anderson reported he and his staff had met with the county Department of Emergency Management to review the Whatcom County plan. He said funding was available for tsunami warning signs and the only drawback was that the local community would be responsible for maintenance and repair. He suggested using an All Hazards approach to planning, which the former task force had adopted in their "Survival in Isolation" brochure. The county has maps they can share that show low lying, flood prone areas, from which we could define evacuation routes. He recommended the creation of a different brochure for wider distribution and recruiting candidates for a new CERT class, where former CERT certificants could re-certify.

John Gargett agreed with the All Hazards approach and said that recent research shows the weakest part of emergency management efforts is in the spread of knowledge. He also said that the Community Resilience view suggests that community members are the first responders and fire and law enforcement take a second responder role to free them up for critical situations. While NOAA has modeled some of Whatcom County for tsunami risk, they have not done Birch Bay or Blaine. He pointed out that another less obvious risk is the Hazardous Materials aspect of all the propane tanks in the area. Other aspects to consider are gun violence and drug labs. He suggest

that the plan adopt the ICS (Incident Command System) or, more recently renamed, NIMS (National Incident Management System).

Mavis Dalzell pointed out that FEMA offers online classes on ICS and Kathy Berg suggested those of us not familiar with the system might do the classes as homework prior to the next meeting.

Chief Anderson mentioned the LEPCs (Local Emergency Planning Committees), started through SARA (the Superfund Amendment Reauthorization Act) in all counties, that created emergency plans in a book with sections for each identified hazard, such as tsunami, severe storms, earthquakes, and hazardous materials. Therefore, identifying our local hazards and creating a plan around that should be our first priority.

Ruth Higgins mentioned that the original task force had considered the various hazards affecting our area and concluded that the primary issue was the potential isolation if the I-5 Nooksack River bridge failed, or responders could not reach us for whatever reason, regardless of what the hazard was, we would need to be able to survive.

John Gargett said that the Cross Border Agreement provides us with the resources of White Rock and Surrey, such as hospitals, fire and rescue, and law enforcement.

Terry Terry suggested we might look at Sudden Valley's plan, as their situation is very similar to Birch Bay's with two roads in and out, a communication system with HAM radios with weekly calls.

Mavis Dalzell mentioned the Whatcom County COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster), which gathers groups that will help out during a disaster; one local member is the Birch Bay Bible Community Church. They send out a checklist asking individuals what help they can give. She also encouraged members to attend a LEPC meeting.

Terry Terry said Spring is a good time to organize, as Summer is such a busy time we could only do a limited amount, but would be ready to get busy in the Fall.

Conclusions: It was agreed we should coordinate with Blaine, BP, the State Park, the Neighborhood Deputy, as well as the Water and Sewer District and local churches that have already been involved. Recognizing the need for dedicated expertise to lead the effort, Kathy Berg nominated, and Doralee Booth seconded, John Gargett as Chair; he suggested a co-chair situation would best serve the group. Henry Hollander nominated, and Doralee Booth seconded, Ron Anderson as Co-Chair. Both nominations were unanimously voted aye.

The next meeting date, time and place will be determined.

Submitted by  
Ruth Higgins for  
Kathy Berg, Interim Chair

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