

Getting Ready For The Next 'Big One'

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Are you prepared for the next disaster?

Apparently many county residents are making the attempt to be ready as a result of last month's storm. Two classes — the last one held Thursday at Cabrillo College — both drew large attendance.

"Emergency preparedness is about the 100th priority until something happens," explains instructor Ron Staley. "In our area, with the big earthquake potential, someday it's going to become the number one priority for everybody."

Staley is vice principal at Watsonville High School and coordinator of emergency preparedness for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. The recent classes were taught as part of Cabrillo's community services program.

While preparing for "that next big one" is much more difficult on a large scale such as with a school district, Staley is quick to note that it is much easier for individuals or families.

Six basic areas have to be considered, according to Staley. They are:

- Drinking water — At least three quarts per person and enough for a minimum of 48 hours should be stored in a sealed container in a cool, dark part of the house.

- Sufficient shelter. (Easy for individuals and families as long as they don't live in a tent.)

- Fire for warmth and cooking — Wood, portable heaters, propane stoves or kerosene heaters and stoves.

- Human waste disposal — A sufficient supply of plastic garbage bags is necessary as are tools, such as pick and shovels, to dig latrines.

- Food — Although truly a secondary necessity since survival is possible for several days just with water, persons should store canned goods that could be used in an emergency.

- First aid kits — Supplies should be on hand for the prevention and treatment of further illness or injury.

Staley's courses focus on preparation for the very worst situation. He explains basic emergency preparation changes in major disasters.

"Normally you give a person first aid and then try to get them to the nearest hospital," he says. "In a major disaster, though, you'd probably be isolated anywhere from 48 to 72 hours from any outside help."

After the Jan. 4 storm, for example, local residents suddenly began purchasing flashlights, batteries, candles and portable heaters and stoves, he explains. "If you don't think ahead of time, you're never going to make it to the store in a real disaster," he says.

Staley emphasizes the need for having drinking

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water on hand. He recommends plastic containers (since glass breaks). There are even special types available that prevents light from entering.

Water should be stored in cool, dark areas like the garage or below the house.

Along with the water should be a purifier, such as Chlorx. Two to four drops should be added, Staley says, before drinking to kill bacteria.

Staley is continuing to improve the disaster preparations for the school district. So advanced it is, for example, that he will meet with Santa Cruz City Schools administrators this week to update them on the program.

The recent flood pointed out two areas in which the Pajaro Valley school district was lacking — communications and transportation. School trustees have since approved portable FM radio units that will link buses to the main district office.