

Valley network calls for radio operators

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

More volunteer radio operators are needed in the Santa Cruz Mountains to help neighborhoods remain self-sufficient during emergencies.

The Valley Emergency Communicators network, a group of citizen-band and ham radio operators in the San Lorenzo Valley, is looking for volunteers who can call for help or keep their neighbors informed in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

The network is part of an emer-

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gency preparedness system that operates under the auspices of the Valley Resource Center in Ben Lomond.

Disaster preparedness is essential in the San Lorenzo Valley,

which experiences floods, mudslides, freezes and earthquakes, said Mary Hammer, executive director of the resource center.

The valley is nestled in the western edge of the Santa Cruz

Mountains and generally receives triple the rainfall of surrounding areas.

Laced with side canyons, earthquake faults, streams, creeks and a river, the landscape is actively evolving.

When disaster struck previously, as it did during a torrential rainstorm in 1982, many neighborhoods were isolated by downed trees or bridges, flooded creeks, or mudslides. When telephone lines were downed or overloaded, residents found the only way to call for help was by radio.

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Every four years, according to voter registration records, 34 percent of the population moves out of the San Lorenzo Valley area.

While most longtime residents are old hands at riding out emergencies, many newcomers are unprepared for the harsh reality of winter in the Santa Cruz Moun-

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tains. Radio broadcasts can provide them with crucial information, Hammer said.

"So many have no idea what to do when the power goes out, let alone how to locate their kids after an earthquake," Hammer said. "This program also identifies where the latchkey children, elderly and disabled are."

Using topographic maps, the group divided four valleys in the Santa Cruz Mountains — the San Lorenzo, Zayante, Lompico and Scotts — into 53 sectors likely to be isolated by flooding or landslides during a disaster.

Each sector includes several neighborhoods, each with its own coordinator.

After a disaster, coordinators assess the damage in their neighborhoods and report to their sector leaders.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For more information on the Valley Emergency Communications network, call the Valley Resource Center at (408) 336-2553.