



For Immediate Release

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Community Emergency Preparedness

Often, when people hear the phrase "Emergency Preparedness", they automatically think of police, fire, emergency medical services (EMS), emergency management, federal agencies, etc. However, the other preparedness partner that most don't think about is the private sector.

The Waukesha County Emergency Preparedness Committee is a good example of private entities working hand-in-hand with local emergency services. This all-volunteer group is primarily healthcare focused, and includes the four medical/surgical hospitals within Waukesha County: Community Memorial in Menomonee Falls, Elmbrook Memorial in Brookfield, Oconomowoc Memorial in Oconomowoc, and Waukesha Memorial in Waukesha. Additionally, the committee includes representatives from freestanding healthcare clinics, law enforcement, fire, EMS, emergency management and private industry.

The committee formed in October of 2001, one month after the 9/11 attacks, as a way of forging collaborative preparedness efforts between healthcare entities. "We realized that if a terror attack or large-scale natural disaster were to occur in Waukesha County, more than one hospital would be involved. We needed to establish working relationships and planning efforts that involved all the hospitals in the County, so we could collectively deal with an event," states Doug Birlingmair, committee chairperson and hazardous materials specialist for Waukesha Memorial Hospital. "To that end, we developed tools and working relationships that are being used as templates in other parts of the State."

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“Community Emergency Preparedness,” *continued...*

For example, hospitals have developed equipment-sharing agreements that allow specific equipment and supplies to be quickly transferred from one hospital to another without delay, and the committee now plans one countywide preparedness exercise per year to practice coordinated response efforts. “Last year we held the largest full scale hospital based exercise in Wisconsin’s history. A total of 14 hospitals and clinics, and over 60 other agencies throughout the region participated. We never would have been able to accomplish that five years ago.” Birlingmair proudly states.

Preparedness Tip #2:

All too frequently, we assume everything will be fine or that emergency responders will be immediately accessible whenever we need them. As a result, preparedness planning doesn’t occur. Emergency Management Coordinator William Stolte recommends, just like the hospital program mentioned above, that businesses develop emergency plans to ensure they can continue operating and protecting their employees during times of crisis. Stolte suggests asking simple questions such as, “When was the last time you considered what to do if a tornado warning is issued affecting your business? Do your employees know where the safest areas are located? Do they know the fastest route to fire escapes? If your business sustains damage, do your employees know what to do to protect themselves, co-workers or visitors?”

Planning and practice are critically important survival factors during disasters or emergencies. The Federal Emergency Management Agency publishes a guide for citizens entitled, “Are You Ready?” The guide is available on the internet (www.fema.gov) or in hardcopy form. Business continuity planning guides are also available from the American Red Cross.

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