

**THE MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS
AND
CITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS**

- I. HISTORY
- II. THE MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Background
 - C. Volunteer Management
- III. THE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM PROGRAM
 - A. Curriculum
 - B. Equipment
 - C. Coordination and Communication
 - D.
- IV. BUILDING EMERGENCY COORDINATOR PROGRAM
- V. CONCLUSION

I. HISTORY

Our local history of earthquakes - Long Beach (1933), San Fernando (1971), and Whittier Narrows (1989) - has provided city government and the Fire Department with valuable experience on the subject of earthquake preparedness. Lessons learned from these incidents emphasized the need to provide plans which would mitigate the damaging effects of an earthquake or other disaster.

In September 1985, Los Angeles officials visited Mexico City following an 8.1 magnitude earthquake which killed over 10,000 and injured over 30,000 of their populace. Most noteworthy, was the number of citizens (spontaneous volunteers) who clearly responded to the needs of their community during this disaster. These groups of "spontaneous volunteers" were credited with over 800 successful rescues. Unfortunately, during the 15-day rescue operation, over 100 of the untrained volunteers lost their lives while attempting to help their neighbors and loved ones.

Five minutes into the October 1, 1987, Whittier Narrows earthquake all emergency medical resources of the Fire Department were depleted. Within 15 minutes, the Operations Control Dispatch Section had a backlog of calls requesting Fire Suppression and Rescue personnel. This was a large earthquake, but not the "major quake" that is expected in Southern California within the next 30 years. This event served as a reminder of how quickly the Fire Department and other emergency services can be overwhelmed during a widespread disaster.

In response to a need for trained individuals who can provide rescue services to those victims of natural disasters, the Fire Department has taken a lead role to enact legislation, organize, and train community response teams, and plan for future needs.

II. THE MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

A. Introduction

It is generally accepted that Southern California will experience a major damaging urban earthquake within the next few decades. One of the major concerns is that the impact will encompass a wide varying area. If this is the case, dedicated emergency services will be responding to situations where the number and scope of incidents are sure to be overwhelming. This is especially true if you consider that the Fire Department, and others involved in rescue and recovery, will have suffered the effects of impaired command, communication, and rescue capabilities. Operational efforts will be further hampered by the general disruptions to society and damage to the normal infrastructure.

Anticipated structural failures will contain multiple victims. The lack of information on their location, coupled with the disruption of normal access routes, offer serious challenges for emergency services personnel.

With time being an important factor, Field Commanders must count on immediately available resources for effective early rescue efforts; this must include the use of spontaneous volunteers. History has shown that people will respond to the needs of their community, and have done so during every disaster or major event. It was discovered that much of the emergency work was accomplished by volunteers near the scenes of devastation. Convergent or spontaneous volunteers were viewed as a major resource, but also as a potential problem. One of the primary concerns is that these volunteers are placing themselves in jeopardy. If they are not properly managed, they will be injured or, in worst case, added to the list of fatalities.

B. Background

We have learned that the first phase of any disaster event is characterized by the emergence of **"spontaneous volunteers."** The first rescue efforts are often performed by loved ones, friends, or co-workers performing light or surface rescue. The term "light search and rescue" is characterized by the rescue of injured, but not trapped, or the rescue from lightly damaged structures where entrapment is caused by the building contents, i.e., file drawers, bookshelves, appliances, or small pieces of debris. These rescues are typically accomplished by uninjured survivors with simple hand tools and rudimentary knowledge.

A significant percentage of those trapped are rescued during this initial phase; estimates range from 80 percent to 90 percent. Evidence indicates that this figure may be as high as 97 percent, as reported during the 1980 earthquake in Italy.

The effort expended during this initial stage often tends to be chaotic, and is characterized by self-start rescue operations without the benefit of organization. In disaster events, this work force should be considered an extremely valuable resource and once harnessed can assist in the rapid rescue of trapped victims. It is clear that this work effort can be greatly enhanced by providing an improved level of safety. The safety of the spontaneous rescuer will be ensured by effective management.

There are many factors affecting the survival rate of trapped victims, but time is the primary consideration. The effective use of both trained and untrained volunteers will shorten the time frame for initial rescues and positively impact the effectiveness of all rescue operations.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers (trained by the Fire Department) will assist their communities during the initial phase of a disaster. This is the crucial time when the dedicated emergency services may be overwhelmed.

Our Department experienced the effective use of civilian volunteers twice during 1992. They are as follows:

1. In February, 1992, heavy rain flooded the Sepulveda Basin. Volunteers assisted with sandbagging operations in their own neighborhoods, and assisted the Fire Department by working in fire stations that were designated as sandbag distribution centers. The use of these community volunteers provided relief for station personnel and allowed Firefighters to better use their time dealing with emergency operations.

2. In May, 1992, during the Los Angeles civil disturbance, news footage showed trained volunteers, identified by their green helmets and vests, pulling fire hose and directing traffic. These volunteers can provide a resource to Fire Department field operations.

Volunteers who have completed the Fire Department's training course will become "Registered Disaster Service Workers." This designation is recognized by the City of Los Angeles and the State of California. As a registered Disaster Service Worker, an additional umbrella of insurance is provided through the State Workers Compensation Insurance Fund.

It is recognized that the training of these volunteers is limited, and that all volunteers will not achieve the same level of expertise. However, the goal of the program is to provide an added level of skill and safety to those who will be doing the work, regardless of their level of expertise.

C. Volunteer Management

To effectively manage the volunteer resources at the scene of a disaster, Company and Incident Commanders must be able to recognize these volunteer resources. Commanders should assess volunteer skills and abilities, provide for their safety, and use them to their full potential.

The first priority will be to define the types of volunteers who will appear at the scene. Volunteers have been categorized by the California Office of Emergency Services as being one of the following two types:

1. Convergent Volunteer - This volunteer is one who appears at the scene of a disaster, not as part of any organized response effort, and whose skill level is unknown.

2. Organized Volunteer - This volunteer is part of an organized effort and has been trained to a specified level (i.e., a member of the City's CERT). The Community and City Response Teams are readily recognized by the green helmet and vest. A Business Response Team may not be as easily identifiable, and may or may not be trained by the Fire Department.

The knowledgeable Incident Commander will be aware of the ICS provisions for a **"volunteer coordinator"** (see Evacuation ICS packet), and assign the task when appropriate. Trained volunteers and professionals should be used to provide direction and guidance to those with no formal training. It is clear that an overall strategy will be necessary to provide the most effective use of the volunteer resources available.

Another valuable tool in the management of the convergent or organized volunteer, and a first step in providing for their safety, will be the use of the Personnel Department's Occupational Safety Office (OSO). As part of the City's Emergency Master Plan, OSO is responsible for assisting in the coordination of convergent volunteers. During a designated emergency, this resource will be accessed through Emergency Operation Center. Designated OSO employees are assigned vehicles or emergency trailers that contain the following:

- First-Aid Kits
- Survival Packs
- Drinking Water
- Propane Bottles
- Propane Stoves
- Single Use Portable Restroom Kits
- Portable Floodlights
- Toilet Paper
- Size "D" Alkaline Batteries
- Flashlights
- Hard Hats

These are just a few of the supplies that are readily available for Department use.

The classification of volunteers is an important first step for the Incident Commander. When Fire Department personnel arrive on-scene, there is a good chance that volunteers will be engaged in some type of rescue work. It is important for the professional to recognize the value of volunteer efforts and to maximize their effectiveness. There simply will not be enough Fire Department resources to deal with the scope of a major disaster.

On the night of the 1989 earthquake in San Francisco's Marina District, volunteer rescuers outnumbered Fire Department personnel three-to-one during the first few hours of operation. An officer from the San Francisco Fire Department said, "In a disaster situation, each Firefighter should be able to coordinate five to eight civilians, and perform some tasks or assignments." This was the first time the professional Firefighters of San Francisco were required to address this unusual situation. Many of the volunteers in the Marina District would gather around a professional and try to figure out silently how they could help. The volunteers were able to accomplish their work by mimicking the professionals. The officers on-scene in the Marina District acknowledge the fact that they were entering new territory, based on their prior experience.

The use of civilian volunteers is discouraged during normal emergency operations; therefore, it is important for the Incident Commander to be aware when the operational mode is changed. It is good to keep in mind that during disaster operations, the Incident Commander is likely to be a single Company Commander, operating with only the crew and limited resources. As volunteers gather and are attempting to assist, responsibility for their safety becomes part of the job for first responders.

A primary responsibility should be to make volunteers a part of the solution, not part of the problem. Risk management, as it relates to the volunteer, will fall on the shoulders of the professional. By directing and supervising the efforts of the volunteers, the safety of volunteers can be somewhat controlled.

The strategy used in the direction and supervision of these volunteers should include: making sure each situation is isolated; all information is evaluated; tasks are delegated; and needs are communicated.

1. Isolation

The initial action of the first responding Company should be to isolate the numerous incidents that are occurring simultaneously within a given area. The assignment of single company members to these sites will require the establishment of some type of perimeter. This perimeter will preclude a mass flood of additional volunteers into an unsafe area.

This isolation of the incident will allow the first responder an opportunity to assess the number and location of volunteers who are already working. Volunteers can often be used to create work areas or perimeters for first responders by using fire line tape or erecting other barriers.

The next step will be to direct nonworking volunteers to the volunteer coordinator, if one has been established. The volunteers will then be registered and equipped with available safety equipment. This will provide the Incident Commander with volunteers prepared to relieve those working on-scene. As the first volunteers are relieved, they can be directed to a rest area. At this time, they too will be registered and given proper safety equipment, if this has not been accomplished already.

This initial action of isolating the incident(s) and the volunteers will establish control. As organization is brought to chaos, the effectiveness of the operation will only improve.

2. Evaluation

As steps are being taken to isolate the incident, the first responding Company is gathering important information to make future decisions. One of the best providers of that information will be those individuals or survivors who are, and have been, in the vicinity of the incident for a period of time.

The information acquired from these survivors/volunteers is a vital part of the initial damage assessment, and will be used during the size-up and development of the incident action plan. It is important to remember that the professional will be responsible for the risk management of volunteers. Through this evaluation, hazardous areas that will be "off limits" will be identified for the unprotected volunteers.

As the first responding Company begins to get a feel for the labor intensiveness of the disaster and is preparing to assign tasks, an important action is to assess the special skills of the volunteers. They may possess important specific skills (i.e., mechanic, doctor, military, nurse, carpenter, or other experience or training). This will enable the Company Commander or professional rescuer in charge to use them in the most effective manner. In addition, knowledge of the volunteer's background will add credibility to the information they are providing.

3. Delegation

With a better understanding of the task at hand and a thorough evaluation of available resources, the Company Commander will have a better opportunity to effectively use volunteer resources.

A volunteer with a specific skill would be assigned to a task group or team of not more than five, and be given an assignment. When assigning volunteers, delegate one person as the group leader. Pre-thinking assignments will improve the performance of each task group (i.e., utility control led by a contractor, rescue operations led by a carpenter, or medical treatment area assignments led by an ex-army medic).

Do not forget the importance of runners, as normal communication channels become unreliable. Trained or untrained volunteers can also be used to attain communication between groups, locate needed logistical support, update damage assessments, and recruit additional volunteers.

Perhaps one of the most important functions for the Company Commander is to initiate logistical support. Occupational Safety Office personnel and their equipment trailers, coupled with the equipment carried by the trained CERTS, should provide a logistical foundation for the volunteer coordinator. OSO should be contacted early in the incident to allow time for them to initiate action.

The amount of logistical support for the volunteers will often dictate the success or failure of their tasks. One of the first lessons learned from the volunteers in the Marina District was their need to collect tools. They often found themselves working with bare hands to free trapped victims. This, of course, dramatically increases the potential of injury to the rescuer/volunteer, and does not lend itself to volunteers being part of the solution.

Other logistical needs, such as drinking water, food, rest stations, and sanitation should be addressed as soon as possible to maintain effectiveness during a continuous operation. Volunteer resources can do much to assist in attaining these goals, when they are given good direction.

4. Communication

Clear communication has always been one of the key factors in an effective emergency operation. Many volunteers will be hesitant to act without direction. The clearer the direction, the better the chances are of conducting a successful operation. Provide clear, concise directions, and make sure they are understood. Consider the level of experience and capability of the volunteer, and adjust communications accordingly. (Charts and diagrams may be useful.)

One of the best ways to give direction to an untrained volunteer is by example. Pair up trained volunteers with the untrained and have volunteers work alongside trained professionals. Volunteers also need positive reinforcement. If they are personnel doing a good job, let them know. Make note of any special circumstances for future acknowledgements.

III. THE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (CERT) PROGRAM

The purpose of the CERT Program is to improve community self-reliance and, therefore, survival in the event of a large disaster. History has shown that emergency service resources will be depleted to the extent that some individuals or neighborhoods will need to rely on themselves during the first 24 to 72 hours.

Selected groups of volunteers are trained in basic self-help emergency functions, such as disaster fire suppression, utility control, search and rescue, and disaster medical operations. Teams are chosen from three environments: Neighborhood Residential, Business, and City employees. In neighborhoods, individuals from home-owner associations, neighborhood watch clubs, or religious congregations are brought together to form Community Response Teams. Businesses are selected by location or public service potential. High-rise office buildings, large hotels, or multi-building industrial complexes are often chosen for training. They are designated as Business Response Teams. In order to improve disaster operations and to ensure City recovery and reconstruction, all City departments are encouraged to participate in this program and, by Mayor's Directive Number 54, have a priority for training. They are designated as City Response Teams.

A. Curriculum

Training provided by the Community Response Team Unit consists of seven 2-1/2 hour sessions spread over seven weeks. Business and City government teams are taught during business hours at their work location. Community teams are taught in the evening, utilizing a local school, church, or other appropriate training site.

Class 1 - AN OVERVIEW OF THE EARTHQUAKE THREAT IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. Personal and family preparedness is given a special emphasis. It is important that individuals be comfortable about the safety of their family and loved ones, if they are to function away from home during an emergency. This class includes "how to" information on nonstructural hazard mitigation.

Class 2 - DISASTER FIRE SUPPRESSION TECHNIQUES. This includes fire chemistry, fire extinguisher types and their use, and maintenance. Students are taught ventilation theory and the importance of proper overhaul as part of the fire suppression process. Class lecture and hands-on demonstrations cover utility control and the extinguishment of a flammable liquid fire using a dry chemical extinguisher. The basic first responder techniques and hazardous materials identification are also introduced at this time.

Class 3 (**Session 1**) - DISASTER MEDICAL OPERATIONS.

Recognition and treatment of life-threatening emergencies, triage, and treatment area management are covered during Session 1.

Class 4 (**Session 2**) - THE EVALUATION, RECOGNITION, AND TREATMENT OF NONLIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCIES. Preparation and the need for proper supplies are taught throughout the program. The need for creative and improvised first aid is recognized. It is felt that in a disaster, the availability of standard first aid supplies will be limited, and the use of a victim's clothing or items from his/her surroundings should be utilized.

Class 5 - SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS. This includes evacuation, search techniques, and rescue methods. The students are taught to recognize various types of building construction and to be familiar with their inherent problems during an attempted rescue. The principles of lever and fulcrum are discussed and demonstrated, along with the need for proper cribbing as part of a rescue operation. A strong emphasis is placed on safety. Students are encouraged to limit their efforts to surface rescue only.

Class 6 - DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE-TEAMS WITHIN THE VOLUNTEER'S BUSINESS, CITY DEPARTMENT, OR COMMUNITY. The importance of having an organizational plan during an emergency is stressed. A simplified Incident Command System (ICS) is demonstrated and practiced. Students are also introduced to techniques and procedures necessary to organize and lead untrained volunteers. The class is completed with a session on disaster psychology.

Class 7 - COURSE REVIEW AND A DISASTER SIMULATION EXERCISE. Students are required to apply the principles which they have learned over the first six weeks. Their goal is to bring some order to the chaos of the simulated disaster. Teamwork and safety are emphasized in all exercises.

B. Equipment

Community and City Response Teams are provided with lime green hard hats and vests that are silkscreened for identification. Funds have also been allocated to produce identification cards for trained volunteers. City employees are provided additional safety equipment and first aid supplies, and the community groups are encouraged to purchase the same. Businesses are screened at the time of scheduling to ensure that they are committed to a preparedness effort. This commitment and a willingness to provide trained employees with basic safety equipment is needed in order to provide safety and effectiveness.

C. Coordination and Communication

Through this program, teams of trained volunteers are located throughout the City. It would benefit Company Commanders to identify and meet with these community volunteers prior to the need. These volunteers are familiar with their neighborhoods and large residential and industrial complexes, and have predesignated emergency meeting locations.

The use of volunteers during district drives would eliminate unnecessary driving and speed up the prioritizing process following an earthquake. The Disaster Preparedness Section is continuing to work on communication plans to improve the coordination and use of volunteers.

IV. **THE LOS ANGELES CITY BUILDING EMERGENCY COORDINATOR PROGRAM**

The Building Emergency Coordinator (BEC) in Los Angeles City facilities, is the equivalent to a Fire Safety Director but with additional authority. The implementation of this program was designed to provide a coordination of effort in City facilities, both before and during an emergency.

Every City facility housing ten or more City employees shall have a Building Emergency Coordinator. The Building Emergency Coordinator will supervise the three emergency groups that operate in City buildings following a disaster: the Floor Wardens, City Employee Response Teams, and Damage Assessment Teams. These people may be considered as trained volunteers. The Building Emergency Coordinator will also coordinate with the Fire Department, Department of General Services, Personnel Department, and others to provide a "Building Disaster Plan" and necessary employee training.

The Building Emergency Coordinator's duties, as directed by the Emergency Operations Organization, include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Direct the disaster response of the building's occupants for the duration of the emergency, after consulting with the emergency response agencies, where possible.
2. Receive initial damage assessment reports from Floor Wardens, and dispatch City Employee Response Teams, as appropriate.
3. Coordinate with the Department of General Services staff, Damage Assessment Teams from the Department of Building and Safety, and other emergency response personnel in gathering and reporting damage assessment information. The Building Emergency Coordinator shall authorize evacuation of the building or portions thereof on the basis of the best information available at the time.
4. Maintain ongoing communication with building occupants regarding evacuation and disaster response efforts, and the building's operational status.
5. Relay damage assessment and operational status to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) via proper channels.
6. Refer inquiries from the media to the City Emergency Operations Center (where activated) or the lead emergency agency where applicable.
7. Be available to the Fire Department, Police Department, or medical authority with information concerning the status and condition of the building and its occupants.
8. In the event of an evacuation, coordinate the re-occupancy of the building, if and when it is certified as safe to re-occupy.

Y. CONCLUSION

During a disaster, people will respond to the needs of their community. They will arrive en masse, (unorganized to a large extent), wanting to help and be part of the solution.

It is the responsibility of every first responding Company to turn this resource into a positive force. Managing and finding reasonable tasks for these volunteers will lessen the possibility of the untrained volunteer becoming endangered or from disrupting the tasks being performed by the professional rescuer. Many of the time-sensitive and labor-intensive jobs can be accomplished more effectively with the help of volunteers.

With a little knowledge and forethought, the safety and effectiveness of all volunteer disaster workers can be enhanced, and the impact of the emergency can be minimized.

The emergency professional should know how to get the most out of all available resources, and ensure that additional victims are not brought to the disaster scene.