

Fairfax CERT at Capitol Shield

By Judy Howell. Reprinted from the Fairfax CERT Blog.

On Tuesday, Oct. 18, and Wednesday, Oct. 19, Fairfax County CERT members participated in something wonderful. The Capitol Shield 2012 exercise held at the old Lorton prison in Lorton, Va.

The prison grounds were the scene of a massive disaster (exercise). A (simulated) hurricane hit taking out all of the power and all fuel storage areas in the area; leaving roads inaccessible and the population totally unruly. School shootings occurred; a shooter was loose on the U.S. Capitol grounds; and a local area hospital was (virtually) leveled in a giant bomb blast. Four more (simulated but dirty) bombs went off in areas around the D.C. region; and anthrax was (virtually) released. Professional response activities were completely overwhelmed.

Sounds like a disaster, right? It was – so who was “called out” to assist? Why, Fairfax County CERT of course!

A number of your CERT members integrated into disaster response operations with a number of different federal, state and county agencies. We rescued upwards of 200 victims each day of the two days of the exercise – from all over the Lorton complex. We helped with getting patients to decontamination stations; the Navy deconned them and then we rushed them to medical.

On Tuesday we and our Montgomery County CERT counterparts were the only coordinated medical response team for the Lorton field training exercise. We worked as both victims and responders on Tuesday.

On Wednesday we were purely rescuers with rescue responsibility

for the southern half of the Lorton complex. We integrated into military medical assets on site and helped with loading the medevac helicopters and AMBuses taking wounded to D.C. area regional hospitals.

We had an awesome time, folks. So good the attendees are still talking about it. [More online]

Judy Howell is the volunteer public information officer with the Fairfax CERT. This article was reprinted from the CERT blog. Read the complete article at <http://fairfaxcountycert.blogspot.com/2011/10/fairfax-county-cert-at-capitol-shield.html>.

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Every Home and Business Should Have a NOAA Weather Radio

The recent storms and flooding that have devastated many parts of the East Coast serve as a stark reminder of how important it is to be prepared when it comes to bad weather.

One of the essential preparedness items you should have is a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio. A NOAA Weather Radio can help you monitor dangerous storms: it transmits alerts of

Alternate Heating Sources

The colder winter temperatures cause many of us to seek out alternative sources to heat our home and keep warm. Alternate heating sources are a major contributing factor in residential fires. The following safety tips will help you keep a safe home.

- Keep at least 3 feet of clearance between your heat source and anything combustible.
- Do not keep or store combustible materials in closed areas or near a heat source.
- Never leave a heater on when you are not in the room or when you go to sleep, and never leave children or pets unattended near heating sources.
- If you use an electric heater, be careful not to overload the electrical circuit.
- Avoid using electrical heaters in bathrooms as they may come in contact with water.
- Only use heaters that have been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features, such as automatic shut-offs. It is important to install and use heaters according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Do not use a range or oven as an alternate heating source. This is a safety hazard and may be a source of toxic fumes.
- Do not use fuel burning appliances without the proper room ventilation.
- Never fill a kerosene heater while it is in operation or hot. Avoid overfilling.

For more information, visit the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr.

severe weather and dangerous conditions before they arrive.

The National Weather Service (NWS) broadcasts forecasts and severe weather warnings and watches 24 hours a day over the NOAA radio network.

A watch means that potentially life-threatening weather is heading toward your area. A warning means that potentially life-threatening weather is imminent or already occurring. NOAA's radio system is an all-hazards system, providing watches and warnings for such incidents as floods, tornados, oil spills, 9-1-1 telephone outages, terrorist and AMBER alerts, as well as post-event information.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency recommends that every home and business have a NOAA Weather Radio receiver as standard equipment for around-the-clock reports.

Weather radios are available at electronics stores at prices ranging from \$20 to \$200. Features you should look for when purchasing one:

- Alarm tone - Allows the radio to be set on silent but produces a special tone to alert you to severe weather.
- Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) - Provides area specific information by filtering out alerts that do not affect your immediate area.
- Hand crank or battery operated - To produce operating power.
- Tunable to all NWS frequencies.
- For those with a hearing impairment - A feature that allows radios to connect the alarms to other attention-getting devices such as personal computers and text printers.

More information is online at www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr.

The Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management is available to deliver emergency preparedness presentations to community organizations and homeowners associations. If interested, contact Marcelo Ferreira at 571-350-1013, TTY 711, or via email at marcelo.ferreira@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Check Chimneys and Smoke Alarms Now

Is your chimney safe? How do you know?

The August earthquake might have damaged your chimney. You need to know whether it is safe or not before using your stove or fireplace this fall and winter. Broken or cracked chimneys can let heat, smoke and toxic gasses such as carbon monoxide into your home, and your home could even catch fire.

Check Your Chimney for Damage

Some damage is obvious, and some is hidden:

- Check to see if bricks have fallen or the chimney is leaning.
- Look for shiny areas on your metal chimney pipe. This means the chimney moved during the earthquake.
- Look for cracks at joints where the chimney connects to the firebox, at the roofline and in the attic.
- Check for debris that may have fallen into the fireplace.
- Use a screwdriver to check the mortar between the bricks or stones. If it crumbles when you pick at it, the chimney may be a hazard.
- When in doubt, consult a licensed engineer or contractor. For the name of an inspector, call your insurance or mortgage company.

Check CO Detectors and Smoke Alarms

Carbon monoxide (CO) detectors and smoke alarms save lives. If it's possible that you had chimney damage, make sure you install these and inspect them regularly.

- Consider purchasing combination smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.
- Install them in sleeping areas and on every level of your home.
- Install them away from air vents.
- Interconnected smoke alarms are best because if one sounds, they all sound.
- Test smoke alarms monthly. Change alkaline batteries at least once a year. Use a date you already know as a reminder, such as your birthday or when you change your clocks.
- Prepare and practice a fire escape route with everyone in your home, including children.

For more information go to www.usfa.dhs.gov/smokealarms or www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr.

Marcelo's Minute



Marcelo Ferreira

October was Cyber Security Month. What do you know about potential threats and how to avoid them? In 2009, the total dollar loss from Internet crime was more than \$559 million, up from a \$264 million reported loss in 2008. The top reported offenses included identity theft, non-delivery or non-payment of merchandise, credit card fraud, auction fraud and computer fraud (according to the FBI and Internet Crime Complaint Center).

The Fairfax County Department of Information Technology offers the following to stay safe online:

- Use strong passwords. (symbols, numbers, etc.)
- Maintain separate passwords for different accounts.
- Never connect unauthorized devices to systems (phones, USB drives, etc.).
- Keep your operating system and applications patched and current.
- Keep anti-virus software up-to-date.
- Never visit un-trusted websites or follow links provided by unknown sources.
- Never respond to unsolicited or spam incoming emails.
- Never open attachments received in suspicious emails.
- Never provide personal information to uninitiated online sources.

Additional information is available at:

- www.dhs.gov/files/events/cybersecurity-tips.shtm
- www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/cyber/cyber
- www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc_1158611596104.shtm

The Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management encourages every business, organization and family to get involved in emergency preparedness efforts. If you need a presentation about emergency preparedness or other emergency-related topics, call 571-350-1000, TTY 711, or email marcelo.ferreira@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Marcelo Ferreira, OEM community liaison, holds the Associate Emergency Manager (AEM) credential from the Virginia Emergency Management Association (VEMA).

Cybersecurity Tips

General Tips

- Set secure passwords and don't share them with anyone. Avoid using common words, phrases or personal information and update regularly.
- Keep your operating system, browser, anti-virus and other critical software up-to-date. Security updates and patches are available for free from major companies.
- Verify the authenticity of requests from companies or individuals by contacting them directly. If you are being asked to provide personal information via email, you can independently contact the company directly to verify this request.
- Pay close attention to website URLs, particularly the URLs of websites you visit. Malicious websites sometimes use a variation in common spelling or a different domain (for example, .com instead of .net) to deceive unsuspecting computer users.

Email

- Turn off the option to automatically download attachments.
- Save and scan any attachments before opening them. If you have to open an attachment before you can verify the source, take the following steps:
 - Be sure your anti-virus software is up-to-date.
 - Save the file to your computer or a disk.
 - Run an anti-virus scan using your computer's software.

Social Media, Video Games, Forums, Chat Sites and More

- Limit the amount of personal information you post. Do not post information that would make you vulnerable, such as your address or information about your schedule or routine. If your friend posts information about you, make sure the information is something that you are comfortable sharing with strangers.
- Take advantage of privacy and security settings. Use site settings to limit the information you share with the general public online.
- Be wary of strangers and cautious of potentially misleading or false information.

Mobile

- Only access the Internet over a secure network. Maintain the same vigilance you would on your computer with your mobile device.

- Be suspicious of unknown links or requests sent through email or text message. Do not click on unknown links or answer strange questions sent to your mobile device, regardless of who the sender appears to be.
- Download only trusted applications from reputable sources or marketplaces.

At Home

- Talk to your children about Internet safety. Keep your family's computer in an open area and talk to your children about what they are doing online, including who they're talking to and what websites they're visiting.
- Inform children of online risks. Discuss appropriate Internet behavior that is suitable for the child's age, knowledge, and maturity. Talk to children about the dangers and risks of the Internet so that they are able to recognize suspicious activity and secure their personal information.

At Work

- Restrict access and secure the personal information of employees and customers to prevent identity theft.
- Be suspicious of unsolicited contact from individuals seeking internal organizational data or personal information. Verify a request's authenticity by contacting the requesting entity or company directly.
- Immediately report any suspect data or security breaches to your supervisor and/or authorities.

Learn more online at www.dhs.gov/files/events/cybersecurity-tips.shtm.

Businesses and residents in Virginia can participate in the Statewide Tornado Drill, scheduled for 9:45 a.m. on Tuesday, March 20, 2012. If there is widespread bad weather March 20, then the drill will be rescheduled for Wednesday, March 21. The drill is an opportunity for schools, businesses and individuals to practice important tornado safety steps. During the drill, NOAA Weather Radios will sound a tornado warning tone alert to start the drill, and participants will practice quick evacuation to designated safe areas in their buildings. Radio and TV stations also will broadcast the tornado warning sound. Detailed instructions for identifying safe areas, conducting a tornado drill and registering for the Statewide Tornado Drill are available at www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia/stayinformed/tornadoes. Register your participation at www.surveymonkey.com/s/TornadoDrillRegistration.



Winter Came Early! Are You Ready?

Winter Preparedness Week is Dec. 4-10

By Laura Southard

Old Man Winter paid an early visit to many Virginia communities at the end of October with snow accumulation and cold temperatures! Were you surprised? Were you ready?

During winter months, there could be power outages, icy roads, closed schools and businesses and health problems associated with wind, cold and snow. Take a few simple steps now to prepare.

- **Make a plan.** Decide on a meeting place outside of your neighborhood if your family is separated and cannot return home because of closed roads. Choose an out-of-town relative or friend to be your family's point of contact for emergency communications. With your family, write down your emergency plan – get a free worksheet at www.ReadyVirginia.gov. Click on Make a Plan for more details.
- **Get a kit.** Start with these basic supplies for winter weather: three days' food; three days' water (a gallon per person per day); a battery-powered and/or hand-crank radio with extra batteries; and your written family emergency plan. After you have these essential supplies, add a first-aid kit, medications if needed, blankets and warm clothing, supplies for any special member of your household and necessary pet items.
- **Stay informed.** Before, during and after a winter storm, you should listen to local media for instructions from emergency officials. There may be times when you are advised to stay in place until it is safe to travel. Stay informed about winter storm watches and warnings and road conditions. You can get road condition information 24/7 by calling 511 or checking www.511Virginia.org.

Go to www.ReadyVirginia.gov and print out an emergency supply checklist and a family emergency plan. Get ready now – and remember, Winter Preparedness Week in Virginia is Dec. 4-10.

Laura L. Southard is public outreach coordinator with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management.

FAIRFAX COUNTY



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps

The Fairfax County Citizen Corps harnesses the power of individuals through education, training and volunteer service to make communities safe, stronger and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues and disasters of all kinds. There are five core programs:

Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)

Provides support for the police department by incorporating volunteers so that law enforcement professionals have more time for frontline duty. VIPS includes auxiliary police officers, administrative volunteers, and the Citizen's Police Academy.



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/vips.htm

Neighborhood Watch

Brings private citizens and law enforcement together to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods. It brings to life the simple concept of neighbors watching out for neighbors. Volunteers may join an existing group or establish one in their neighborhood.



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/nw.htm

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)

Operated by the Health Department, MRC is composed of medical and non-medical volunteers trained to assist the community in dispensing medication during public health emergencies.



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mrc/

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Trains people in neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools in basic disaster response skills, such as fire suppression and search and rescue, and helps them take a more active role in emergency preparedness.



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/cert.htm

Fire Corps

Volunteers are trained to perform non-operational administrative duties at the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department Headquarters and at volunteer fire stations.



www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/firecorps.htm

After the earthquake...

Is Your Chimney Safe?

HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Was your chimney damaged in the earthquake? Find out before you use your stove or fireplace. Your life could depend on it.

Broken or cracked chimneys can let heat, smoke and toxic gasses escape into your home. Your home could catch fire. You could breathe in carbon monoxide—an invisible, odorless gas created when things burn—that can be deadly.

Some damage is obvious. Some is hidden. To start:

- Check to see if bricks have fallen or the chimney is leaning.
- Look for shiny areas on your metal chimney pipe. This means the chimney moved during the earthquake.
- Look for cracks at joints: where the chimney connects to the firebox, at the roofline, and in the attic.
- Look to see if there are metal ties that hold the chimney to the house. If there aren't any, your chimney is at greater risk.
- Check for debris in the firebox.
- Use a screwdriver to check the mortar between the bricks or stones. If it crumbles when you pick at it, the chimney may be a hazard.

Deciding whether a chimney has had earthquake damage is not always easy. When in doubt, consult a licensed engineer or contractor. For the name of an inspector, contact your insurance or mortgage company.

Carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors save lives. Get them.

Your life and your family's lives may depend on it.

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Virginia Department of
Emergency Management



www.vaemergency.gov
www.ReadyVirginia.gov

When in Doubt, Throw it Out!

CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reminds residents that after flooding, you need to identify and throw away food that may not be safe to eat. Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water; food that has an unusual odor, color or texture; perishable foods in your refrigerator where the power has been off for four hours or more; and canned foods that are bulging, opened or damaged.

Thawed food that contains ice crystals can be refrozen or cooked. Freezers, if left unopened and full, will keep food safe for 48 hours (24 hours if half full).

For more information, visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm076881.htm or the Fairfax County Health Department at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd.



Fairfax County, Va., publication.

To request this information in an alternate format, call 571-350-1000, TTY 711.

Winter Safety

By following the following fire prevention measures, you can greatly reduce the risk of fire in your home and enjoy a safe winter season.

- Keep all objects at least 3 feet away from heating equipment such as the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable space heater. Have a 3-foot “kid-free zone” around open fires and space heaters.
- Before you go to sleep, be sure your fireplace fire is out. Never close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper will help the fire heat up again and will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house.
- If synthetic logs are used, follow the directions on the package. Never break a synthetic log apart to quicken the fire or use more than one log at a time. They can burn unevenly, releasing higher levels of carbon monoxide.
- Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.
- If you use an electric heater, be sure not to overload the circuit. Choose an extension cord the same size or larger than the appliance electrical cord.
- Avoid using electrical space heaters in areas where they may come in contact with water.
- Always remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Always let ashes cool before putting them in a metal container and keep the container a safe distance away from your home.

Last but not least, plan and practice a home escape plan with your family. If windows are used as emergency exits in your home, be sure that all the windows open easily. Home escape ladders are recommended.

If you do not have one already, install a carbon monoxide detector. Carbon monoxide is a tasteless, odorless, invisible gas, which is absorbed by the human body 200 times faster than oxygen. Gas fireplaces, gas stoves, barbecues, gas furnaces, automobiles, propane appliances and any other device that produces a flame will produce carbon monoxide.

Learn more about carbon monoxide poisoning at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr.

Be Flood Smart; Buy Flood Insurance

Savvy Virginians know how to protect their homes from the country’s number one natural disaster: buy flood insurance. “All it takes is a few inches of water to cause major damage to your home,” said Virginia Department of Emergency Management’s State Coordinating Officer Michael Cline. “Flood insurance is a low-cost way of protecting yourself and your property from harm.”

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is backed by the federal government, but policies are sold by private insurance agents throughout Virginia. Homeowners, businesses and renters can purchase flood insurance as long as their community participates in the program.

Homes in high-risk areas, have a 1-in-4 chance of flooding during a 30-year mortgage. As a result, many borrowers in high-risk areas are required to buy flood insurance. But flooding can happen anywhere. In fact, nearly 20 percent of flood insurance claims come from moderate- to low-risk areas.

The average homeowner pays about \$600 a year for flood insurance. NFIP flood insurance can be purchased for as little as \$129 a year for a home in a low-risk area. Costs increase significantly in high-risk zones. Coverage can include up to \$250,000 for the structure up to \$100,000 for its contents. For businesses, structural coverage is available up to \$500,000 and up to \$500,000 for contents.

Flood insurance is not dependent upon a federal disaster declaration. NFIP pays claims even if a disaster is not declared by the president. Less than half of the floods in the U.S. result in a federal disaster declaration. Since 1973, the NFIP has paid nearly \$40 billion dollars in flood insurance claims, helping hundreds of thousands of families and businesses recover from flood events.

Be flood smart. Buy flood insurance. Remember: It takes 30 days after purchase for flood insurance to go into effect. Act now. Go to www.floodsmart.gov to find out more.

Look for Signs of Stress

The initial trauma from two late-summer disasters – Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee – has passed, but the psychological effects can linger. Stress caused by loss or a traumatic experience can sneak up on people and influence behavior and emotions. The elderly and children are particularly vulnerable to stress after a disaster and may require special considerations. Some common signs of stress are:

- Trouble concentrating or remembering things.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Replaying the events and circumstances of the disaster over and over in your mind.
- Anxiety or fear, especially when things remind you of the traumatic experience.
- Feeling depressed, sad or down much of the time.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Nightmares.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Feeling overwhelmed.

Stress isn’t just emotional. It can manifest in physical sensations like fatigue, stomachaches or diarrhea, headaches, sweating or chills, chest pain or a rapid heartbeat. Changes in behavior also can signal that you are under stress. Do you withdraw or isolate yourself, even from family and friends? Are you restless or prone to emotional outbursts? Do you startle easily?

Here are some common-sense measures to help you overcome stress and get you back to yourself again.

- Talk with friends and family about your feelings. Sharing common experiences helps you deal with and overcome anxiety and feelings of helplessness.
- Get back into your daily routines as soon as you can.
- Maintain a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep.
- Find ways to relax. Do a fun thing after a difficult or stressful task.
- Get some physical exercise every day. Walking is a great stress reliever.

Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty or angry is common after a traumatic event. Watch out for problems that are more than you can handle. If signs of stress are serious or if they persist, see a counselor or other mental health professional.

What You Can Do to Prepare Your Home and Family for the Next Storm or Flood

Heavy rains and flooding can occur anytime. Officials recommend that residents prepare now for the next storm or flood.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), some simple actions can be taken to lower your chances of flood property losses and to make sure your family is safe.

Creating and Keeping Records Safe

Create a file with your personal information in it. Keep the information in a safe deposit box or in a waterproof container in your home. The file should contain:

- Life and property insurance policies and your agent's contact information.
- A copy of your deed if you own real estate.
- Financial records and bank account numbers.
- An inventory of your possessions.
- Photographs of each room and its contents.
- Critical documents such as wills, trusts and medical directives.

Preparing Your Home

- Keep your sump pump in good working order.
- Clean out debris from gutters and downspouts regularly so rainwater can flow through.
- Keep fuel tanks anchored to prevent them from floating away and possibly causing harm.
- Raise electrical items such as switches, circuit breakers, and wiring at least 12 inches above the point you think floodwaters might reach.
- If possible, raise the furnace, water heater, washer and dryer onto cement blocks at least 12 inches above the point you expect floodwater might reach.

Safeguarding Your Family

- Make a safety kit with a three-day supply of drinking water and canned food, a can opener, first-aid items, blankets, a National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) radio and a flashlight with batteries.
- Put emergency contact telephone numbers by each phone, program them into your cellphones, post them on the refrigerator and teach your children how to dial 9-1-1.

- Know your community's evacuation plan and practice the flood evacuation route with your family. Find safe routes along higher ground from home, work and school.
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be the contact for your family in case of an emergency.
- Make plans to protect and care for your pets.
- Purchase flood insurance. When the next flood comes you will be glad you have an insurance settlement to help you recover from any losses you have.

To find the agent closest to you, go to www.floodsmart.gov and enter your address. For more information on emergency preparations visit Ready.gov or www.DisasterAssistance.gov, or call FEMA's Helpline at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily. Those with speech or hearing impairments may call TTY 1-800-462-7585. If you use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 1-800-621-3362. Operators are multilingual and calls are answered seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. You also can visit FEMA via smart phone or tablet at m.fema.gov.

www.floodsmart.gov – Information regarding FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program.

www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/build_safer.shtm – Low-cost measures to reduce risk from natural disasters, building and retrofitting tips, and how to build a safe room.

www.fema.gov/rebuild/mitigation.shtm – Information and resources for making your property less susceptible to future losses.

www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/community_build_safer.shtm – Safer building design and construction for design professionals, home installers, surveyors and state and local officials.

www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/after.shtm – Resources for different phases of recovering and rebuilding.

www.fema.gov/rebuild/smart_strong.shtm – Information and guidance on building safer.