

New mapping effort to locate, prevent potential disasters

By Ashley Ratcliff

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RPV — In the event of an emergency, many already know to plan accordingly to find escape routes from the home. But one thing that tends to be forgotten is where to find and how to turn off the utilities — a step that could prevent a bad situation from turning catastrophic.

Realizing the success of Washington state's Map Your Neighborhood program, Herb Stark, a 30-year Rancho Palos Verdes resident, took the initiative to bring this program to the city. In RPV's version of the undertaking, all utility shut-off switches within individual homes — including water, power and gas — will be located with the help of homeowners associations and Neighborhood Watch emergency preparedness block captains.

The data will then be placed onto maps using Palos Verdes on the Net's Geographic Information System, or GIS.

"In a major emergency where there's going to be loss of power and telephone, our neighborhoods, like many others, are going to be isolated," Stark said. "We're going to have to fend for ourselves. If there's a major disaster, you're going to have to learn quick where to turn the utilities off."

Stark, a Ladera Linda Homeowners Association member, said the block captains will be provided with the information locating the utilities in

their neighborhood to use if a prompt response is needed.

Gary Gyves, an RPV senior administrative analyst, said the program offers a major benefit to the community, considering the city doesn't have the manpower to turn off the utilities in all 15,300 residences should an emergency transpire.

"Say the big earthquake hits and they're going around checking their neighbors to see if they're OK," Gyves said. "If they smell gas, or if there was an electrical fire or the power lines were down, they could go to the map."

Another incentive to GIS mapping is that the information will be available permanently, Gyves added.

This mapping effort began to complete the missing link of RPV's existing program for emergency preparedness, Stark said.

There currently are more than 80 Peninsula Volunteer Alert Network, or PVAN, amateur radio operators. PVAN emerged — with the help of RPV's Neighborhood Watch — with the goal of identifying all the emergency-preparedness resources in a neighborhood.

"That means doctors, nurses, people who have gone through CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) training," Stark said. "In addition to that, the program identified all people that would be at risk in the event of a disaster — people that are homebound, that would depend on telephone and power, children, people

with medical problems."

While the assumption is that the homeowner knows exactly where these shut-off valves are, many forget, Stark said.

"This would be a good review for them, as well as for the [homeowners] associations," Stark said.

The hope is to implement the mapping program throughout RPV at a cost of about \$200 per neighborhood. For now, at least 20 neighborhoods have been organized.

Gyves said there is a possibility that the city may contribute financially to the program in the future.

PVNET Founder Ted Vegvari said the GIS Department interns, five local high school students, starting this week began preparing data, under its staff's supervision.

"If we weren't providing internships and donating services on this, it wouldn't be possible," Vegvari said. "We hope that by providing the services in support of the local homeowners associations ... that this gives them the tools they need to react in an emergency."

RPV during its Fourth of July celebration on Saturday will present its emergency-preparedness booth, where residents can learn how to shut off their utilities.

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