

May 31, 2013

Summary Report From the Woodlake Neighborhood Watch Leadership Conference: May 30, 2013.

Attendees were treated to coffee and dessert while viewing a pre-show that stimulated discussion and set the mood for the meeting.

On Howard S.'s invitation, Cpl. Nichols, Bell County Sheriff Deputy, made a surprise visit to briefly address the group concerning the department reorganization and dissolution of the Community Oriented Police (C.O.P.s). In order to account for the upgraded squad cars without having to add additional personnel to cover an ever expanding area of responsibility, Sheriff Lange has had to make some budgeting decisions and reassignments. Cpl. Nichols reassured the group that the level of protection hasn't changed, if not improved, and that programs like "Vacation Watch" remain as a viable program.

Cpl. Nichols fielded questions concerning "expectation of privacy" of citizens on public streets or on private property (trespassing) being video recorded by the homeowner. Tom K. commented that our "Crime Spy" video surveillance network has been put to the test and has proven effective identifying whether an activity appears suspicious on a couple of occasions and asked whether or not the Sheriff's department would have any interest in having access to illegal activity we may capture on video.

Cpl. Nichols visit was much appreciated and will be invited at our next leadership conference.

Howard S. began the main presentation to focus the discussion on where our Neighborhood Watch program is; where we want to go, and what we need to do to get there. The natural evolution of any neighborhood watch is to expand their attention beyond crime prevention (which is the main objective) to disaster response.

"Your attendance here is a testament to your skills and talents born of years of experience, your longevity as a community member and your express interest in crime prevention. Some of you may be called upon to become certified for Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), you may be asked to conduct triage and provide or train others to perform first aid to include CPR, applying sutures and setting broken bones. Some others maybe suited to conduct safety surveys and provide security (armed if necessary) or, because of your knowledge of communications (i.e. Ham radio for example), you might be the communities only connection to the outside world. Others may have, be able to provide or know where to acquire a structure for temporary shelter for billeting or as an infirmary. Our community is blessed to have a clergyman (or two) to fulfill our spiritual needs or special rites".

The presentation outlined six major disaster events in order of highest to lowest risk and considered scenarios of similar events; for instance, the recent F5 tornado that leveled Moore, OK, the wildfire that destroyed dozens of homes near Bastrop, earthquakes in east Texas, pandemic models and biological terrorism. The group considered and discussed the mitigating factors, our vulnerabilities and our response following a catastrophic event.

The group thought that the sample Quick Reference Guide was a good start toward promoting heightened awareness and disseminating information that could protect your property or save a life.

Howard S. made the point that to help others you have to be prepared to help yourself and advised the group of the various references available to that end: usaonwatch.org, <http://www.fema.gov> and Ready.gov.

As he was one of the first witnesses on the site of the fire two years ago, the importance of communications was emphasized by Bill K. and it was strongly recommended that we reestablish a phone tree. More importantly, in addition to keeping an eye on or watching each other's property when absent, is that adjacent neighbors exchange emergency information with each other including next of kin.

During open discussion the topic of emergency escape routes was addressed. The new home in Section II adjacent to the tennis courts has created a deterrence to our only accessible egress. It may still be possible to get around through the other vacant lots but there is some prepping that might have to be done. Howard S. will assess that issue before the next conference.

Lastly, a question about what could be done about drivers exceeding the 20 mph speed limit; not just because it's the law, but also because its unsafe. Many of our neighbors who perambulate on the street with their pets or their grandchildren have voiced concern over the repeated offenders who may cause them harm or to harm to a deer that jumps onto the road. Several recommendations, including stop signs, video cameras at strategic locations to record vehicle make, model, color and possibly license plate, to sending out letters admonishing the guilty parties are of little value if there's no law enforcement to record and cite the offender. One recommendation I will forward to the BOD is to have notices mailed to every household that express our concern and insist everyone slow down. Doing 30 or 35 in a 20 mph zone will not get you to your destination faster.

The conference closed with the attendees having gained more appreciation for the amount of preparation needed and the multitude of factors that must be considered before any plan can be fully implemented – and then, survival is only likely if you keep your head while everyone else is losing theirs.

Howard S.
Woodlake Neighborhood
Watch Coordinator