



Photo by Jennifer Wake

For What the Bell Tolls Emergency Preparedness at SMC By Jennifer Wake

The tolling of the Saint Mary's College bells is always a good reminder of the time of day, but Saint Mary's Public Safety Chief Bill Foley says they could be utilized in a new way – to alert the campus community in the event of an emergency.

The idea is one of many being considered by Saint Mary's as part of the college's comprehensive emergency preparedness plan. "Since [the bell] is electronic, we're meeting with the manufacturer of the system to see if we could either do a voice override or could get a distinctive tone that could alert the campus community," Foley said.

The college is also in the final stages of an emergency response website where people can find information about a disaster as well as have the capability to report their status following a disaster. "Families could scroll down through the list to check on students, faculty or staff instead of trying to call in or come to campus," said Foley.

Communication, however, is just one component of emergency preparedness.

"We have a lot of resources that can be utilized in the event of an emergency," Foley said. "The town of Moraga and the college, as well as Lafayette and Orinda, are reviewing our disaster plans in light of shared resources – what we have, what we can share with one another if it's needed – and that includes spaces. In any sort of disaster in which there is extensive property damage, you start looking for wide open spaces to go."

Areas on campus could be utilized to perform triage, coordinate emergency equipment and supplies, or even house pets and livestock. "It might make sense to use the tennis courts as an animal care area because it's fenced," Foley explained.

Foley meets monthly with local authorities from Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, including the three police chiefs, the superintendent of Moraga schools, and the fire chief, but understands that during a major emergency, considering the size of the neighboring towns, response to the college will be minimal at best.

As part of their overall plan the college's emergency preparedness work group, chaired by Foley, has conducted disaster preparedness workshops and has created a building coordinator program. The program has 26 volunteer staff, faculty and Brothers, who have been trained in first aid, CPR, light search and rescue, and disaster preparedness.

"They have large carry-all bags that contain supplies, food, first aid, flashlights, gloves, and tape so they can do some immediate triaging within an area," Foley said. "We've also started to stockpile general supplies on campus for use in these sorts of disasters or long-term emergencies."

In February Saint Mary's engaged a consulting group to advise it on emergency preparedness and response issues along with local emergency response agencies. The college also co-sponsors Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training on campus, and has scheduled a CERT training specifically for Saint Mary's faculty and staff in October.

Foley says he would like to expand the volunteer base to include students who could work with trained leaders to help with traffic control or even light search and rescue during a major emergency.

When developing any plan at the college, Foley keeps in mind that Saint Mary's is a town within a town. "When you think about it, services come to the front of the gate, and we take it over from there," he said.



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