

# Disaster Preparedness

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Contractor Rolland Mathers of Shelter Belt, Inc., points out some fire ladder hazards to EBMUD's Mark Silva in Canyon.

Photos Chris Lavin

For it's when the ground settles, the work begins. "That's the scary part," said Jonathan Goodwin, the community appointed fire-and-disaster chief of the small community of Canyon, west of Moraga. "People don't think about what happens after." (See related story on page B2.)

People in Canyon, as in other neighborhoods in Lamorinda, are thinking about those moments "after." The United States Geological Survey offers interactive maps ([www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov) and search shakemaps) that show that Moraga, for instance, sits mainly on mud. "You can expect landslides and closed roads," Goodwin said.

Yet the key to getting through any disaster, he added, is to consider the concept of "reciprocal altruism." It is a concept that is widely accepted in biological fields, one in which organisms help each other to keep them all alive and healthy. Using in part an elaborate brochure funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, called "Map Your Neighborhood," and available through the fire department, Canyon and other neighborhoods are beefing up their awareness of who lives where, who has pets, who might have an elderly relative, or who might have children home alone after school.

"Here in Canyon, we know most of that already,"

Goodwin said. But things change all the time, he added. Tenants change, people have babies, elderly parents move in or people become incapacitated.

The MYN brochure outlines nine steps to take after a disaster, and is intended for neighborhoods that

are already organized or attempting to organize. Its first step: Look after your family, but then "reciprocal altruism" takes over. The idea is to be self-sustaining after any type of disaster. The brochure includes "Help" and "OK" signs to hang outside your house to let neighbors know your status.

As the brochure says, "In a disaster, your neighbors are your closest sources of help."

People have different abilities," Goodwin said. Some people can look after children, some will know how to approach a collapsed structure, some will know CPR.

"That's the critical thing," Goodwin said. "If you have a person with a crushing injury, or someone with a heart attack, and emergency services can't get in, you need to know how to get that person out."

In other words, one must know who has a chainsaw, or a four-wheel drive.

"It's a starting point," Goodwin says about the brochures. The next step is to get to know the neighbors, so that reciprocal altruism can take over when disaster strikes.

"Everybody loves a potluck," Goodwin said. So maybe we should all plan to have one.



Residents from Canyon meet at Canyon School to discuss plans for reacting to an emergency.