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Moraga learns lessons during The Great ShakeOut

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Millions of people around the world practiced their skills on Oct. 19, hoping to be ready in the event of a major earthquake. The town of Moraga joined in with government agencies, schools, and other organizations in the U.S., Canada, and other countries.

The scenario for Moraga was a this: a 7.2 Earthquake struck the Hayward Fault near Berkeley at around 10 a.m. The quake lasted about a minute and a half and caused major damage in Moraga. As the drill continued, Moraga Police Chief Jon King added reports of major incidents, including a ruptured gas line and fire at the Moraga Center, power outages, landslides, broken buildings and roads. Schools needed to release students to their parents, and needed to know what to do with children whose parents could not be reached.

In major disasters, it is usual that normal means of communications fail, such as telephones and the internet. In order to assure that the area can maintain communications through radios, the Lamorinda Area Radio Interest Group (LARIG) was asked to set up a radio communications drill in the Moraga Public Works Department. The drill was scheduled for 10:19 a.m. Unfortunately, many Californians were awakened at 3:19 a.m. when the alert was erroneously sent out by the MyShake App seven hours early. MyShake apologized for the glitch, and promised that it will not happen next

year.

But at 10:19 a.m. the alert did go out across the Bay Area. LARIG began its drill, reaching out on the General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS), using its repeater located in the Berkeley Hills, calling for people to radio in their positions. About two dozen people responded, throughout Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga. In addition to the volunteer radio groups, the town owns about 20 radios and maintains a radio channel for Public Works.

However, the radio system failed when it came to contacting the schools in Moraga. Moraga School District Superintendent Julie Parks later reported that, although they could clearly hear the radio transmissions, for an unknown reason they were unable to respond.

After the exercise, Chief King conducted a "hot wash," where participants get together and discuss when worked, and what didn't work, and what can be improved for the future. Some suggestions for improvement included the need for more interactive incident tracking, and King said that WebEOC has that capacity. WebEOC is a secure, internet-based emergency information management application that provides real-time information sharing of operational details from various government and public safety groups in response to an imminent threat, emergency or disaster.

Emergency supplies are kept in a trailer on town property, and it was discovered that the contact information stored in the trailer was not as up-to-date as needed. It was also determined that Moraga needs a copy machine in the town offices, and that the trailer needs refreshed maps, forms, dry erase boards, and message pads. A resources list should include contact information for local businesses, schools and churches.

King wrapped up the exercise by saying that the town would try another such exercise in 8 to 12 weeks, to retest with improvements in place.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

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