

SSEPO article

The purpose of the South Skyline Emergency Preparedness Organization (SSEPO) is to promote emergency preparedness and response capability at the neighborhood level in the event of a disaster that overwhelms traditional emergency response resources.

SSEPO was started in 2000 by a group of residents concerned that the community was not prepared for major natural disasters. One of the first of the South Skyline residents to recognize the need for an organization to respond to a variety of emergencies was Irene Long. Eva Blum, Sherry Niswander, Tom Anderson, Judy Grote, Chuck Schoppe, Dr. Bill Fowkes, Dr. Rich Lee, and Barclay Slade together with Ken and Heather Broome, were some of the founding members. Early on the group obtained grants from the Silicon Valley foundation to start buying radios for distribution in the neighborhoods to facilitate communication in an emergency, as well as setting up a container full of medical equipment. This started two focal areas that have stayed with us: neighborhood communications and medical preparedness.

By the early 2010s the focus had broadened to really look at neighborhood organizing as the key building block, providing appropriate training to residents, improving infrastructure useful for local emergency response, and furthering closer connections between the community and local fire departments. This concept is about getting neighborhoods to become aware of how they would communicate in an emergency, what the escape routes are, how to get first aid. To this end we try to find a member in each neighborhood to help organize discussion with their neighbors on these topics. The goal is to create

neighborhood level plans for what the residents deem might be needed in a real emergency situation. Neighbors are encouraged to work with and seek out advice from local first responders, and to stage regular drills via phone trees, ham radio, and GMRS radios communications. We support this activity with training materials, first aid training, as well as by providing grants for radios to enable neighborhood communications. This focus has continued to the present, with established efforts in many neighborhoods: Rocky Creek/Clouds Rest, Oakridge, Fox Run, Highway 236/9 corridor, and Portola Heights/Castanea Ridge.

We have continued the program of using grants to buy radios for neighborhoods. To complement this, in 2017 Pat O’Coffey led an effort to build a GRMS repeater to allow neighborhoods to communicate using the low powered radios all up and down the south skyline area. This repeater became operational in 2018.

Also, starting in 2015, we have worked on organizing CERT teams in conjunction with local fire departments, Peggy Wargo helped a lot with this. The CERT volunteers make resources available to the fire departments as needed; it also builds skillsets at the neighborhood level that can be used in any kind of emergency. To tie all these efforts together, we collaborate with agencies on south skyline wide drills. We have organized many such drills over the years. In 2018, we did an earthquake simulation involving fire departments, Stanford Lifeflight, ham radio operators, CERT teams, which included sending CERT teams around neighborhoods to check on houses and determine if rescues were required. We have also done large scale medical drills.

Starting in 2015 of our larger efforts has been helping build out an accurate digital map (Geographic Information System - GIS) of the south skyline area for

emergency responders led by Peggy Wargo in partnership with the La Honda Volunteer Fire Brigade and their indefatigable chief, Ari Delay. The purpose is simple – up here it's often hard to find houses and hydrants on our large properties, and the existing maps are simply not complete. This costs first responders precious minutes trying to save you or your house. We have provided both equipment as well as a lot of labor to go around the neighborhoods mapping houses. Key here is supporting the excellent work being done by the La Honda Fire Brigade.

In 2018 driven by Rich Lee's efforts, we acquired and outfitted a medical trailer to complement the existing medical container. This trailer is mobile, and give us broader geographical coverage in the case of an emergency. We have also organized a variety of first aid trainings, both in Las Cumbres and at the Ranger Station over the years.

In 2018 we also outfitted a helicopter landing site at Castanea Ridge, complete with windsock. This was project was spearheaded by Bryan Osborne.