

LOCAL NEWS

Collaborative focuses on preparing Pass area for disasters

BY JULIE FARREN
Record Gazette

Preparing for a disaster in the San Geronio Pass is the foundation of a collaborative named Passcom, comprised of cities, agencies and organizations that meet once a month to exchange ideas and resources for emergency preparedness.

Twenty-eight municipalities and agencies form the committee that meets at 8:30 a.m. the second Tuesday of the month in Building C at San Geronio Memorial Hospital.

The committee was formed in 1998 and the meetings are open to the public, said chairman Mike Barron, who joined Passcom in 2006.

He became chair a year later and has remained in that position ever since.

There are 150 members on their list, but usually 25 to 30 members attend the meet-



Passcom members discuss disaster plans for the Pass area.

ings.

Barron said that disaster preparedness is something that most people generally don't plan for before an event happens.

Once a disaster happens, then people begin making plans so that they aren't

caught off-guard the next time.

During each meeting, there is a guest speaker and a topic for discussion. Members also give updates on what is happening with their agency or organization.

Justin Gardner, of the

Riverside County EMD, talked about upcoming CERT classes.

Joey Hunter, director of security and emergency management for San Geronio Memorial Hospital, said the hospital was getting a new ham radio.

Dennis Rice reported that the Passcom website had 437 visits and 661 hits.

James Bean, assistant director of operations for the Beaumont Cherry Valley Water District, talked about having enough water to prepare for an emergency or disaster in the San Geronio Pass area.

The drilling wells serve certain areas and that it costs \$1 million to drill and another million to outfit.

Bean said that when a tank is turned off, that affects fire protection.

He also said that all of the groundwater is from the ground. There are groundwater rights for customers, who are not allowed to drill in their service area.

Questions were asked about the costs for getting drinking water.

Bean said that the recycled water is treated at the wastewater treatment plant.

A reminder was given about the Homeless Symposium, taking place this month in the city of Banning.

There are a variety of ideas about how to care for the homeless such as setting up a house where they can

live and be fed and helping them find jobs.

There also is a food outreach in Whitewater, said Mike Simon, vice-president of Passcom.

The problem is getting worse, he said, because the homeless are coming to the Inland Empire and the Pass area from Los Angeles.

Members also were wondering about opening up Highway 74 to Idyllwild. Stacie Kelly, of Riverside County EMD, said, "74 is actually looking pretty good."

The road has been closed and motorists are being escorted up the hill.

Highway 243 is a whole other deal, Kelly said.

The Calimesa Radio Club is holding an event Sept. 11 in the Four Seasons ballroom.

The American Red Cross is looking for volunteers, especially drivers.

Barron said that one of the members, Bob Snedeker, owns Simpler Life in Redlands, which sells disaster preparedness products. He complimented Snedeker's store after the meeting and said it is a much-needed resource for the community.

"The hardest thing about disaster preparedness is that most people get lackadaisical," Barron said.

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