# Community Emergency Plan Toolkit

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# What is the Purpose of This Toolkit?

This document is a step-by-step guide to help you and your community produce a Community Emergency Plan. A Community Emergency Plan is a tool you can use to help you prepare for the emergencies that could affect your community. It is just one way of planning within your community, and does not take the place of, but augments personal preparedness activities (see **Module 3: Personal Preparedness Planning**). You may wish to tailor this approach to better suit the needs of your community.

This guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the *Community Emergency Plan* template which you will find in the **Participant Activities and Worksheets** folder as part of **Module 6: Disaster Planning** on the HHARP CD/USB drive.

This guide sets out how to complete your plan. Look out for the **ACTION** markers for suggestions on how to complete sections of the plan and where to find information to help you.

If your community already has a Community Emergency Plan, you could use this document to update or validate it.

# Why Do We Need a Community Emergency Plan?

Emergencies happen. Local emergency responders (e.g., police, fire fighters) will always have to prioritize assistance for people in greatest need during an emergency, especially where life is in danger. There will be times when you may be affected by an emergency but your life is not in immediate danger. During this time, you need to know how to help yourself and those around you. By becoming more self-sustaining, you and your community can complement the work of local emergency responders and reduce the impact of an emergency on your community both in the short- and long-term.

# Step 1 – Planning for an Emergency

## Getting Started

This section outlines the key stages in getting started and planning for your community.

## Identifying Your Community

Begin by considering who your community is and which communities you belong to. Who is your plan for? A community is a group of people linked by a common bond. Usually this bond is because the people live close to one another but the bond could also be from shared interests or as a result of experiencing similar circumstances. In planning for emergencies, it will usually make sense to think of your community as being those people who live near you, but you may also want to consider talking to and involving other people and communities in your planning as you may need to work together and help each other in an emergency.

Consider including a map and description of your community in your plan.

## Identifying Existing Local Relationships and Getting People Involved

One of the first things to consider is who can help you get started. Community resilience is something many people and communities already do. It is not about creating or identifying a new community network, or a one-time response to an incident, but rather an on-going process of using and enhancing existing relationships.

Consider what already exists around you, who you already talk to, and how you could work together before, during and after an incident. You could look to existing local community networks and groups within your community to see if they can get involved or fit resilience into their agenda, for example local government, Neighborhood Boards, Scout groups, homeowners associations, youth groups, Neighborhood Watch groups, etc. Your local authority's emergency planning team may also be able to help you identify what community resilience initiatives are already in place.

In addition, you could hold an open meeting in which people can discuss their priorities for the plan and identify who is interested in helping to create it.

# Community Emergency Planning Teams and Coordinators

The people in your community who want to take part could form a Community Emergency Planning Team to champion the emergency preparedness efforts in your community. They will also play a role in your community recovery. This could be a new group or build on an existing community group.

Some communities also have a Community Emergency Coordinator and you may wish to consider choosing one for your community. The coordinator takes a lead role in organizing and taking forward the work of the Community Emergency Planning Team, and helps sustain motivation and interest of community members.

The coordinator acts as a contact point between the Community Emergency Planning Team and local emergency responders.

# Collecting Information

**Using local knowledge and identifying vulnerable people**

It is important to ensure that isolated or vulnerable people are contacted to find out if they need assistance during an emergency. Most communities have organizations that have programs and resources to help vulnerable people respond to, and recover from, emergencies. These groups cannot always determine exactly what individuals want and need, nor can they always identify who in your community may be vulnerable in a crisis, particularly those who may not previously have received support. This requires local knowledge and your help.

**Vulnerable people**

Emergencies can make anyone vulnerable and they make life more difficult for those people who are already vulnerable. Your local emergency responders will need to help those in most need first, and it would assist them if the Community Emergency Planning Team had an understanding of those in their community who might be vulnerable in an emergency and where they live. Think about how you can share this information with the local emergency responders if an emergency occurs. Local organizations will also have a good idea of the people or communities who are vulnerable. You may want to consider maintaining a list of these organizations.

It is important to note that:

- People may become vulnerable at any point in their life, and we can all be vulnerable in different circumstances;

- Being vulnerable means different things to different people and groups; and

- Vulnerabilities can vary in their duration and may last through the recovery period after a disaster.

**ACTION:** **Using page 7 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record and maintain a list of organizations active in your local area that may be able to help you to identify vulnerable people in an emergency.**

# Identifying and Preparing for Risks

It is important to be aware of the risks that could affect your community, and understand how you could be affected by them, in order to improve your community's resilience. Individuals and communities should prepare for the risks they feel are relevant to their area.

The information that you collected in **Module 5: Risk Assessment** can be summarized for this section of your Community Emergency Plan. The **Hazard Assessment** (**Worksheets 1 and 2)** that you completed provide information about the hazards your community is most concerned about, and their potential impacts. And the **Community Profile (Worksheet 3)** provides information about community vulnerabilities as well as coping capacities – actions, resources and equipment that can reduce community vulnerability.

Consider including maps of hazard zones, evacuation zones, most at-risk areas, locations of vulnerable populations, etc.

Your local emergency management office will also have information about hazards and threats that have been identified for your area, along with their potential impacts. Consult your State and/or County Hazard Mitigation Plans, which typically include a risk and vulnerability assessment.

Local knowledge shared by community members will likely identify risks that may not be included in the State- and County-level Mitigation Plans. Consider the following potential vulnerabilities when assessing risks in your local area:

**Social**

Are there are any known vulnerable people/groups in the area? Such as:

- People who have recently had an operation;

- People without access to transport;

- People with limited mobility;

- Groups that might find it difficult to understand emergency information; and

- Transient populations (visitors).

**Environmental**

- Are there any particular areas that flood regularly?

- Are there any sites of environmental or historic importance that may be affected?

**Infrastructure**

- Is there a major transport hub in the area?

- Are there any bridges or main roads?

- Are there any large industrial sites in the area?

**ACTION: Using page 2 of the Community Emergency Plan template and the information collected in Module 5 you can summarize:**

- **Potential risks and hazards and their impact on your community; and**

- **What you can do to reduce the impacts of these risks.**

You may find it useful to discuss your community risk assessment with local emergency responders in your area to make sure you understand how you can complement their work in an emergency.

# Assessing Community Skills and Resources

Once your community is aware of the risks it might need to prepare for, it is important to consider what skills, resources and equipment your community already has that can be used, if needed, during or after an emergency.

In **Module 4: Community Resource Mapping**, you documented the skills, abilities and resources of individuals, informal organizations and formal institutions that could be helpful before, during, or after an emergency. Use this information to include a list in your Community Emergency Plan of individuals, organizations and institutions with skills and resources that could assist during an emergency.

**ACTION: Using page 3 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can list your community's skills and resources.**

# Insurance, Health and Safety

When thinking about how community members can help, and the assets and resources you can use, insurance issues typically arise. Many communities see insurance and liability as a barrier to preparing their community for emergencies. While liability is for the courts to decide, a common-sense approach to helping each other is necessary.

In 2012, Chapter 663 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes was amended to exempt an owner of private property who provides emergency access to land, shelter, or subsistence to a person in good faith during a disaster from liability for injury or damage suffered by the person, unless it was caused by the gross negligence or intentional or wanton acts or omissions of the owner of the land. (HB2686 CD1)

It is important to not put yourself or others at risk when preparing or using your plan!

# Identifying Key Locations

Work with your local emergency responders to identify shelters in your area, and see what help the Community Emergency Planning Team could provide to identify places of safety during evacuations.

Different emergencies may affect different parts of your community in different ways so you may need to identify a number of alternative sites.

It is important to obtain advance permission of those responsible for any property or buildings you might use in an emergency. Include maps of key locations in your plan.

**ACTION: Using page 4 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can make a list of key locations you have identified with your local emergency responders for use as places of safety**.

# Emergency Contact List

It is important to keep accurate, up-to-date records of everyone who is in the Community Emergency Planning Team, local police and fire stations, as well as others in the community who have offered their help in an emergency. This will help you to contact everyone quickly and make it easier for you and the local emergency responders to identify who is part of the Community Emergency Planning Team. It is important to respect privacy, and to keep personal information safe. Only share with those who need the information.

You may want to record contacts in a 'telephone tree', which sets out a process through which people have responsibility for calling other contacts. An example of a telephone tree is provided in the Community Emergency Plan template.

**ACTION:** Using pages 5 and 6 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can complete your own emergency contact list or telephone tree.

# Step 2 – What To Do in an Emergency

## Activation of Your Plan

In any emergency, having an emergency plan is not a substitute for calling 911 if there is a risk to life.

When an emergency happens, you will need to know how to activate your plan and contact community volunteers.

You will have consulted your local emergency responders about your Community Emergency Plan as part of your planning process, so in most circumstances you know when to activate your plan. There may be times, however, when it is not clear as to whether or not to activate your plan. Work with your emergency management office to develop a series of triggers you can use as a Community Emergency Planning Team to decide whether to take action. Exchange contact information with emergency responders so they are able to reach a member of the Community Emergency Planning Team during an emergency, and vice versa.

Make sure that sources of hazard warning information are well known, that warning messages are understood, and that your community has multiple ways of receiving these messages. Reference the information in **Module 2: Detection, Warning & Response** as needed.

Consider:

- The types of bulletins or messages that will be put out in the media.

- What you can do safely without the help of the local emergency responders.

Using your list of skills, people and resources, you will need to decide what you can do to safely support the work of the local emergency responders.

**ACTION: Using pages 7 and 8 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record your own activation triggers and first steps to take once an emergency has met the threshold for activating your plan.**

## First Community Emergency Planning Team Meeting

A draft agenda for the first meeting of the Community Emergency Planning Team can be found on page 9 of the template. This is intended to be a guide only. You may find that your

team and volunteers are already getting on with helping but it is important to make sure everyone is safe and working in a coordinated way.

**ACTION:** **Using page 9 of the Community Emergency Plan template as a guide, you can record your own draft agenda in your plan.**

# Evacuation

During an emergency, it might be necessary for some members of your community to be evacuated from their homes to a place of safety. Speak to your local emergency managers to see what role the Community Emergency Planning Team can play in this. Refer to the information in **Module 2: Detection, Warning & Response** to help you understand when an evacuation may be necessary.

You may be able to assist with:

- Knocking on doors in your neighborhood, or delivering emergency messages;

- Managing a neighborhood safe area; or

- Identifying those who may need extra assistance to move to safety.

**ACTION:** **Using page 10 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record any actions for the Community Emergency Planning Team that you have agreed with local emergency responders in their planning for an evacuation.**

# Communications

The Community Emergency Planning Team should discuss how it will cope if communications are disrupted in the area. You may have access to walkie-talkies or amateur radio groups (for example, the Hawaii Emergency Amateur Radio Club).

The Community Emergency Planning Team could also consider going door-to-door or using a bull horn as an option to communicate with the public and get the local emergency warning messages across if it is possible to do this safely. The Community Emergency Planning Team should work with the local emergency responders to ensure any messages that they are delivering to the community are consistent with those issued by local or national authorities.

Worksheets completed as part of **Module 4: Community Resource Mapping** may be helpful in identifying alternative means of communication for your community.

**ACTION**: **Using page 10 of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record alternative arrangements for communicating in your local area.**

# Step 3 – Practicing and Reviewing Your Plan

## Sharing Your Plan

Once you have developed your plan, share it with other community members to get their views. It is important that all members of the community feel that the plan works for them.

It is also important that you share your plan with County emergency management officials and local emergency responders, so that in the event of an emergency, they will know who to contact and what assistance you can provide.

You should record who has a copy of your plan and ensure that they receive a revised copy whenever it is updated.

**ACTION: Using page i of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record a list of individuals and organizations that need to have a copy of the plan.**

## Reviewing and Updating Your Plan

It is important to regularly review and update your Community Emergency Plan to ensure it meets the changing needs of your community. It is also important to make sure that your plan will work in an emergency. You may wish to practice activating the plan to test how well it would work in an emergency and see how ready members of your team and volunteers are to carry out its actions. Work with your local emergency responders to plan and implement a scenario-based exercise (see materials in **Module 7: Exercising the Plan**), using the hazard scenarios and the local risk assessment information you have produced. Exercises are an effective way to test the arrangements you have made in your plan.

Practicing the arrangements in your plan will allow you to identify any problems with it. Once you have practiced your plan, you should review and update it. You should also regularly update your emergency contact lists to ensure accuracy.

When you make any changes and amendments to the plan, be sure to record the amendments so that everyone knows they are using the latest version.

**ACTION: Using page i of the Community Emergency Plan template, you can record and maintain a list of updates to your plan.**

# Checklist for the Community Emergency Coordinator

The checklist below is a prompt you can use as you go through the process of producing a Community Emergency Plan.

- Have you established a Community Emergency Planning Team?

- Have you considered what help and support you need and how to access it?

- Have you considered the risks that your community might face?

- Have you assessed the existing skills and resources in your community?

- Have you identified key locations in the community to use in an emergency?

- Have you considered who in your community might be vulnerable in an emergency?

- Have you decided how and when you would activate your plan?

- Have you shared your plan with your community and local emergency responders?