

## **L.A. Takes Important ‘Steps’ to Prepare Neighbors for Next Earthquake**

Given that there have been more than two decades since a major earthquake – the 6.7 magnitude Northridge quake – struck Southern California, Mona Curry, the project lead for the “[5 Steps to Neighborhood Preparedness](#)” campaign with the City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department, recognized that L.A. residents, like their neighbors to the north, must battle preparedness complacency.

“We were having a hard time reaching our 4 million people here in L.A. to spread the preparedness message,” said Curry. “We knew we had to come up with some new strategies so we went from more individual preparedness to community preparedness which led us to neighborhood preparedness.”

In order to bring renewed energy to the city’s emergency preparedness efforts, the 5 Steps campaign developed easy-to-use and easy-to-understand neighborhood preparedness template and other resources for communities across Los Angeles to make their own plans. The campaign also includes an online Neighborhood Disaster Planning [tool-kit](#) in multiple languages.

In 2012, Curry and her team partnered with the L.A. neighborhood of Montecito Heights to create a full-scale exercise, which the 5 Steps program used to refine its neighborhood preparedness template. “We created a plan with the neighborhood. We wanted to see the plan through their eyes,” Curry explained. And since the exercise, 5 Steps has trained more than 800 Angelenos across the city on how to build and use tool kits and to develop their own plans. “Los Angeles has nearly 100 neighborhood councils, and these allow us the opportunity to market the program at a real grassroots level,” Curry said.

CERT volunteers participate in the 2014 Tarzana exercise.



On October 14, 2014, 5 Steps executed another [full-scale community exercise](#), this time with Tarzana, another L.A. community, in conjunction with the Great California ShakeOut. Curry said she and her team focused more on marketing this year, a strategy which led to coverage from all of the local news channels who came out to cover the full scale exercise in Tarzana. A new website, billboard campaign, cards in city

buses, and a dedicated social media campaign all strengthened and reinforced marketing efforts for the event. Next year, Curry plans to develop and execute another full-scale exercise in another community, while focusing on adding a train-the-trainer component to the program.

After two successful exercises in the last two years, Curry and her team have learned a lot that can be shared with CERT and similar preparedness-related groups across the country. “We have found that the most successful neighborhood plans are created by people who are already CERT trained,” Curry explained. “The reason is that in our 5-step plan we incorporated ICS [the Incident Command System], which distinguishes us.”

The neighbors, Curry added, really seemed to respond to the ICS guidelines, and it created an easier transition from community-based response and command to first responders if that ICS structure is already in place. “The transition is smoother, and they learn that in CERT training.”

In Los Angeles, CERT and 5 Steps work side by side, and the city has recently trained 200 police officers to teach CERT. “We need each other. In the CERT program in L.A., after you receive the CERT training, as part of the very last class you learn what to do next,” Curry said. “The next step once you are CERT trained is to think about leading the effort in your own neighborhood. Go back and create your own neighborhood plan. This helps keep CERT trained individuals involved.”

At the Tarzana exercise earlier this year, Curry said CERT trained volunteers really enjoyed the event, which featured 43 neighbors and 64 CERT volunteers and participants from the local hospital, animal services, first responders, and other community and government organizations. Thanks to the well-publicized exercise, Curry said that interest in CERT training went up across Tarzana. The exercise lasted a full day, culminating in a “survival fair,” Curry said, adding that volunteers started checking in at 5 a.m., moulage started at 7 a.m., and the exercise started at 9:00 a.m. with a drop, cover, and hold simulated event. “CERT folks loved the exercise,” she said. “They get to practice their skills.”

Curry has advice for groups that want to pull off a full-scale exercise but don’t know where to start. “It just takes one person in that community to be interested and involved. If they hear it from government that is one thing, but if you hear it from your neighbor who speaks your language and understands your culture that is a whole other thing.”



The Triage and Treatment station during the 2014 Tarzana neighborhood exercise.

Moreover, Curry says it is critical to include the neighbors in the planning from the very start. Curry said The City of Los Angeles tried to do a neighborhood exercise 8 or 9 years ago, but she said it failed in the area of community participation because it was a city-led exercise.

“Neighbors didn’t really get involved. It was really an exercise for the city government departments and not community residents,” she explained. “When you are doing your planning process, you have to include the neighbors; they have to be in on it from Day 1 if you want a successful exercise. You can’t plan for them; you have to plan it with them to ensure involvement and success.”

What if neighbors want to develop a plan, but don’t know where to start? Curry has advice there, too. “Be creative. Host neighborhood happy hours, seek out established groups, like neighborhood watch groups or book clubs,” she said. “Regardless, you’ll need to make the commitment to knock on your neighbors’ doors. Churches are a good place to start; they can be the hub of the neighborhoods. Also, CERT leaders make great leaders. See if they will partner with you by contacting the CERT trained people in your neighborhood to see if they would like to be a part of planning for your neighborhood.”

*For more information on the City of Los Angeles’ 5 Steps to Neighborhood Preparedness’ Neighborhood Disaster Planning Toolkit, log on to [www.5steps.la/5-step-toolkit/](http://www.5steps.la/5-step-toolkit/).*

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