

A Special Message from Gwen Camp, Director of FEMA's Individual and Community Preparedness Division

This year we faced a wide range of challenges together, including wildfires, floods, mudslides, tornadoes, and severe snow storms. But in the face of these disasters, communities responded by working together, with neighbors helping and supporting one another during these times of great need. As 2014 comes to a close, I would like to thank all of the individuals and organizations who answered the call when their families, friends, neighbors, and communities needed them this year. Special thanks to all of the CERT Programs and Citizen Corps Councils throughout the country who worked so hard all year long to help individuals, families, and organizations affected by disasters, prepare them for future emergencies, and develop their communities into safer, stronger, and more resilient places to live.

CERT Programs and Citizen Corps Councils throughout the United States sprang into action when their communities needed them this year. When mudslides engulfed 49 homes and other structures near Oso, Washington in late March, CERT volunteers in Snohomish and King Counties supported the community by assisting with traffic control, security, and clean up.

That same month, a cargo vessel and barge carrying bunker oil collided in the Galveston Ship Channel. Within four hours of the incident, Galveston County CERT (GCCERT) was activated to help serve the county in what became the fifth largest oil spill in U.S. history. CERT volunteers initially served as spotters, helping the Coast Guard and other local agencies search for affected wetlands, beaches, and wildlife. During the first few hours of the incident, GCCERT was able to provide valuable information that helped track the spread of the oil. Over the month-long recovery period, volunteers manned volunteer hotlines and helped coordinate the efforts of unaffiliated volunteers. Volunteers also continued to search beaches for affected wildlife, calling in if they discovered oil in any of the wetlands. GCCERT also helped educate community members by answering questions about the spill and sharing information about how to properly care for affected animals. Volunteers coordinated efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help ensure minimal harm to marine wildlife, and manned a wildlife hotline 24 hours a day. During the event, Galveston County CERT volunteers contributed over 900 hours of service.

In May, the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority conducted an exercise simulating an airliner crash at the south end of the Reno-Tahoe Airport. Required every three years by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the drill provides an opportunity for medical, fire, law enforcement, and disaster response agencies to practice coordinated response efforts. Nearly 25 agencies participated in the 2014 exercise. During the simulation, 65 Washoe County Citizen Corps volunteers responded to provide security or to serve as role-players, where most portrayed survivors of the crash for the incident site while others portrayed family members of the passengers at the Family Assistance Center. The exercise was an ambitious effort, involving first responders, hospitals, and transportation agencies, and testing communications capabilities, emergency plans and procedures, and the ability of multiple agencies to coordinate effectively with one another during a disaster. The participation of the volunteers was vital to the success of the exercise, and helped to ensure that the simulation was as realistic as possible.

Other organizations also served their communities admirably after disaster struck this year. In May, record 100-degree daily temperatures, severe drought conditions and strong winds caused wildfires to erupt in San Diego County, California, ravaging more than 10,000 acres. The Salvation Army and other relief agencies worked together to help victims and first responders by deploying mobile hydration units to provide nourishment to those in need.

2014 was also a busy year for preparing communities for disasters. This year, more than 20 million people took action during [America's PrepareAthon!](#) events across the country. Among the participants

were six schools in Louisa County, Virginia. In 2011, a 5.8 magnitude earthquake struck Virginia, with its epicenter in Louisa County. On September 30 this year, nearly 6,000 students and staff participated in earthquake preparedness drills. Students built disaster kits, created family communications plans, and practiced how to [drop, cover and hold on](#) as part of the drill. Louisa County is a great example of how a community can unite following a major disaster, with residents making a commitment to one another to rebuild stronger and more resilient, and to work together to help ensure that community members are better prepared for earthquakes and other hazards in the future.

In July 2014, FEMA welcomed the new and returning members of the [FEMA Youth Preparedness Council](#) to Washington, DC for the third annual Youth Preparedness Council Summit. During this exciting two-day event, Council members met with important youth preparedness partners like the American Red Cross, learned about leveraging social media to support their preparedness projects, met with FEMA Community Preparedness Officers who serve as their mentors, and visited the White House.

On September 9, 2014 FEMA also welcomed the [winners of the 2014 Individual and Community Preparedness Awards](#) to Washington, DC for a ceremony at the White House. FEMA and the White House recognized recipients for their remarkable innovation and creativity in preparing and supporting their communities.

While 2014 has been a great year for preparedness, there's still work to do. Thank you for all that you do each year to make the United States a safer, better place to live, work, and learn. Your selfless and innovative acts of service are building a more resilient nation, and inspire us every day.

As we look forward to 2015, I encourage you to take action and renew the preparedness conversation with your family or organization today! Simple activities like downloading the [FEMA app](#), creating a family communications plan, or building a disaster supply kit are all great ways to get prepared. You can also visit [America's PrepareAthon!](#) for valuable tools to help you plan exercises and drills for a variety of hazards. And be sure to [register](#) for the next National PrepareAthon! Day on April 30!

Thank you, and have a safe and happy New Year!