

## **Daisy Mountain Fire Department CERT Responds to Flood Incident in Neighboring Community**

On the morning of Tuesday, August 19, 2014, unusually heavy rains struck New River and the surrounding communities that Daisy Mountain Fire Department serves. The result was something community members called a “historic” event. The area is a largely rural community of nearly 45,000 people and is located in a mountainous area on the northern edge of Phoenix Arizona, where the average annual rain fall is just eight inches. During the downpour, New River and surrounding communities received about 80 percent of their annual precipitation between midnight and breakfast, causing flash flooding and unexpected road closures in the area.

One of those surrounding communities was Black Canyon City, which is north of New River. The Black Canyon City fire chief asked the Daisy Mountain Fire Department’s Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to assist with evacuations, as per the mutual aid agreement between their communities. The Daisy Mountain Fire Department has such agreements with all the surrounding jurisdictions.

At 9:45 a.m. on the day of the incident, Paul Schickel, Program Manager for Daisy Mountain CERT, initiated a CERT deployment request via phone tree. In total, twelve members of the 27-person team answered the call to assist with response and recovery efforts. This marked the first time Daisy Mountain



Daisy Mountain CERT volunteers participate in many local community events.

CERT volunteers responded to an incident outside of their jurisdiction. While some volunteers were able to respond in less than 30 minutes because they lived nearby, road closures delayed others.

“We couldn’t get to Black Canyon City because of rock slides on Interstate 17, and washed out primary and secondary roads. Over the next few hours, the water in the northern communities was flowing through normally dry desert washes to the lower elevations of New River,” said Schickel. By late morning, the volunteers were able to make access through temporarily repaired roads, but the need had now shifted from Black Canyon City to the community of New River. Flood waters rose as high as 14 feet, and swept away mobile homes, propane and septic tanks, vehicles and even the trailer of a semi-truck. Many members of the community are horse owners and had to turn their horses out to fend for themselves since there was no time to evacuate them.

Upon their arrival, CERT volunteers were tasked by the Fire Department with setting up an initial evacuation center to assist residents with immediate medical, clothing, and sanitation needs until the American Red Cross arrived later that afternoon. Many of the evacuees were dramatically rescued from the raging flood waters by Daisy Mountain firefighters, some from their rooftops by helicopter. “CERT’s priority was to identify the evacuees’ initial needs. For a few, this included critical medications since

they had to evacuate without anything but the clothes on their back. The Daisy Mountain Fire Department paramedics contacted doctors of the affected evacuees for refills of the needed prescriptions,” said Schickel. CERT volunteers also helped to process hundreds of cases of bottled water and other donated goods.

Schickel praised the volunteers’ ability to adjust to evacuees’ changing needs. For example, while many residents were not initially concerned about laundry or shower facilities, after several days without running water they increasingly began requesting these services. In response, the Daisy Mountain Fire Department opened its doors to provide evacuees with laundry and shower services staffed by CERT volunteers. When the Red Cross arrived, Daisy Mountain CERT volunteers helped transition evacuees to the Red Cross shelter located at a nearby high school.

Volunteers from the Phoenix CERT program also journeyed to New River, and worked with Daisy Mountain CERT volunteers to assist with damage assessment efforts. Volunteers used hard copy maps as well as mapping programs on their cell phones and tablets to identify and survey five separate areas of New River that were severely impacted by the flooding. After completing the assessments, volunteers shared the data with the Red Cross and the Daisy Mountain fire chief so authorities could analyze the needs of the community and direct relief where it was needed most. Schickel says severe floods strike the community about every two years and Daisy Mountain CERT was “hugely valuable” in response to this recovery effort.

Other local organizations have also recognized the value and expertise of the Daisy Mountain CERT. For example, in 2012 volunteers affiliated with a faith-based organization were supporting recovery efforts following a previous flood. However, the volunteers were inexperienced and unfamiliar with the Incident Command System (ICS), and the organization didn’t know how to manage them effectively. Their leadership contacted the Daisy Mountain fire chief and requested that CERT volunteers deploy to the incident scene, not to directly participate, but to manage the other volunteers using the ICS framework. “I have never seen this happen before. It was a fantastic partnership that developed in the community. It was interesting and worked pretty well,” said Schickel.

Schickel credits the CERT program’s effectiveness and reputation to the rigorous training required of its volunteers. After completing the basic CERT curriculum, volunteers are required to take additional training-courses before they are considered eligible to respond to emergencies as an official team member. The trainings, mandated by the fire department, include workplace violence prevention, infectious disease avoidance, discrimination, and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPPA). Most of these training courses are available online, and must be completed annually. Daisy Mountain also requires that volunteers pass an FBI background check, paid for by the fire department, and attend monthly trainings and meetings.

Schickel says that Daisy Mountain CERT would not be what it is today without the support of the fire department and the community and the dedication of the volunteers themselves. He is especially grateful for the support of his fire chief. He says leadership believes in the program because it’s easy to

see how CERT volunteers benefit the community not only during emergencies, but also through the wide variety of community events they support throughout the year.

If you would like more information about the Daisy Mountain Fire Department CERT program, please visit [www.DMFDC.org](http://www.DMFDC.org) or email [Paul.Schickel@DMFD.org](mailto:Paul.Schickel@DMFD.org)