

Isolated Beach Community Creates Preparedness Sheds for Residents

Dillon Beach, CA, a small town known to residents and tourists for its beautiful beaches, is so remote that it is only accessible via a one-lane road into and out of town. If severe weather blocks the road, those in the town may be without help for an extended period. With 400 year-round residents and tourists numbering up to 5,000 during peak season, preparing for any emergency is critical.



To address this issue, the Dillon Beach Emergency Response Team (DBERT) placed supply sheds throughout their community. They stocked these sheds with tools, first aid supplies, folding tables and chairs, four-sided tents, and other items. The supplies allow DBERT members to respond quickly in their neighborhood. The sheds house everything they need to help residents, triage patients, and respond to an incident for a few days.

“We’ve got lanterns for night time,” said Ted Melden, Operations Manager for DBERT. “We have search and rescue tools. We have headlights for people to put on their hardhats for when they go out to do search and rescue at night. We also have a fairly good supply of first aid equipment, soft stretchers, hard stretchers, fire extinguishers, and Meals Ready to Eat (MRE).”

To find spots for the sheds, DBERT identified meeting points in each neighborhood. Then, they notified residents of the locations.

“We told them if you live in this [area], you go to this shed,” said Melden. “The idea is that hundreds of people will not overrun one shed.”

Formed 10 years ago, the team continues to benefit from the generosity of the community. One homeowner let DBERT use her backroom for meetings and a command post. When they needed a trailer, Marin County donated a utility vehicle. That allowed DBERT to redirect money for additional resources.

The DBERT members stock each shed almost identically, and team members make residents aware of which shed to report to depending on their address. Each shed also includes preset radios. They allow residents to communicate with one another at the shed locations.

These sheds help DBERT to keep their emergency plans flexible. They understand that not all disasters are alike. The secluded beach community works to prepare for a variety of scenarios. If an emergency happens, the residents can report to their local shed for information, first aid, or MREs.

“It doesn’t matter what it is,” Melden said. “It could be a fire, it could be an earthquake, it could be a tsunami.”

The 50 DBERT volunteers meet every month and train. They conduct search and rescue exercises by finding “missing” individuals, triaging them, and taking them back to the sheds. They also participate in full-scale drills twice a year.

“You have to adopt a philosophy of ‘improvise, adapt, and overcome’,” Melden said. “Once you are able to improvise, adapt, and overcome, you are pretty much able to deal with whatever is thrown your way.”

DBERT, like other CERTs across the country, works to engage its community members in disaster preparedness. Volunteering with your local CERT is a great way to learn about your community, give back, and bring about the neighbor helping neighbor concept.

To learn more, visit the [Dillon Beach Emergency Response Team](#) website or follow it on [Facebook](#).