

Organizing Your Neighborhood into a Community



Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergency

Artwork developed by COPE Northern Sonoma County.

Sonoma County COPE organizations empower neighborhoods to develop their readiness to respond to disaster, and consider strategies to recover more quickly, allowing people to maintain the fabric of their neighborhood through any disruption.

SONOMA READY
SONOMA STRONG

About COPE

Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies (COPE) was started by residents of the Santa Rosa community of Oakmont, in cooperation with the Santa Rosa Fire Department and American Red Cross. The Leaders of the Oakmont COPE Program, Sue Hattendorf and Al Thomas have over 2/3 of their 2,800 households participating in their program. Since that time COPE groups have developed organically throughout the county, lead by people who are passionate about preparing for emergencies and helping organize neighbors work together to be more prepared.

The mission of COPE is to help residents, families, and neighborhoods become and remain better prepared to respond to and recover from emergency situations. This includes developing individual response plans, maintaining individual emergency supply kits, and outreaching to neighborhoods in our community.

The information provided in this handbook has been edited from the original COPE Handbook developed by Oakmont/Santa Rosa, the City of Santa Rosa COPE information, as well as the information added by Northern Sonoma County COPE Leadership group. It is our hope that you will take this information and adapt it to meet the needs of your community. We wish you much success in bringing your community together and becoming more prepared for emergencies!

BE READY TOGETHER



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COPE Terminology

Locations

- **Neighborhood:** A section of a community typically comprised of 10 to 20 residents usually defined by geographic areas such as roads or addresses. Rural neighborhoods cover much larger geographic regions than urban neighborhoods.
- **Community:** A region or area of a fire district comprised of varying numbers of residents usually defined by geographic location and natural borders.
- **Local First Responders:** Most often the local established and operational fire house or several if forming a district.

COPE Community Leaders

- **Neighborhood Leader/Co-Leader:** The person who provides the neighborhood residents with information such as: emergency preparedness, process and procedures before, during & after emergency events. Also responsible for “organizing” their neighborhood and maintaining and updating information related to residents in their neighborhood.
- **Community Coordinator:** The person who has primary responsibility for connecting neighborhoods, sharing resources and information to neighborhood leaders, and fostering the development of the COPE program and education in emergency preparedness programs in conjunction with local and county first responders. In some cases, these duties may be shared by a co-coordinator to ensure proper backup and/or help to take on the responsibilities for a large community.
- **Community Co-Coordinator:** The person who supports and assists the Leader in a community. If or when the Community leader is absent or is unable to act, the Co-Leader is the one who leads the neighborhood captains and residents.
- **COPE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP Committee:** Comprises all COPE Community Coordinators into one committee to coordinate efforts, share information, address problems, assist in new COPE start-ups, and to interface with local fire, sheriff, county emergency services, and county management.

Other Information

- **Disable, Access and Functional Needs (DAFN):** Persons with Access and Functional Needs are those individuals with function-based needs (related to a restriction or limited ability to perform activities normally considered routine) that may require assistance before, during, and /or after a disaster or an emergency. This may include, but is not limited to: People with disabilities, people who live in institutionalized settings, elderly, children, people from diverse cultures, people with limited English proficiency/ non-English speakers, people who are transportation-disadvantaged.

Developing a COPE Neighborhood Team

The following seven steps are guidelines to assist COPE Leaders in developing and maintaining their COPE Neighborhood Groups.

- 1. Define the Scope of Your Neighborhood.** Include ten to twenty homes or segment into manageable natural boundary groups. Combine homes and multi-family dwellings if appropriate.
- 2. Build Your Neighborhood Leadership Team.** Each COPE group will need one Leader and two to three people as Co-Leaders. They should be committed to the COPE program and capable of responding after an emergency to rapidly changing situations.
- 3. Take a Survey of the Residents In Your Neighborhood.** Using the Information Form (Appendix Two), document neighbor's names, contact information, special skills, special needs, physical limitations, health problems, and equipment that could be useful such as generators and chainsaws. Be prepared to help neighbors who need assistance.
- 4. Record Critical Information about Each Home.** Record location of gas, water, and electric shutoffs. Understand manual operation of garage door. Note specific fire dangers, such as wooden shingle roofs and location of flammable vegetation. Note availability of special tools for use in emergencies.
 - 4a.** Identify and record Disable, Access and Functional Needs individuals.
- 5. Identify Neighborhood Meeting Site and Escape Routes.** Define alternative escape routes for evacuation based on specific situations. Choose a central meeting site to congregate when emergency occurs. Designate a meeting site near your homes and an alternative safe site outside the neighborhood if the neighborhood is inaccessible or evacuated.
- 6. Schedule and Conduct Meetings with Neighbors.** Introduce COPE Neighborhood Team Leader and Co-Leaders. Review results of COPE Team Survey Form. Discuss central meeting site and escape routes, team actions in the event of an emergency, and communications and transportation to medical control and evaluation centers. Distribute copies of this guide to each resident.
- 7. Maintain Your Plans and Kits with Ongoing Effort.** One great idea is every time you change your clocks (every six months), conduct a COPE Neighborhood Team meeting and review and update all COPE material. Update COPE Team Survey Form for new residents in your neighborhood or changes to needs and capabilities of residents. Review planned meeting site and escape routes. Inform neighbors of any changes.

Suggested Timeline to Establish a New COPE Neighborhood/Community

First 1-3 Months

1. Select 2 or 3 Co-Leaders to be Neighborhood Leaders.
2. Connect with other COPE leaders or County Emergency Preparedness Program Team and fire professionals for training and support.
3. Meet with COPE Team Leadership to define the scope of your neighborhood.
 - a. Include ten to twenty homes.
 - b. If HOA or apartment building, segment into manageable groups. Each apartment complex, apartment floor should be their own 'neighborhood.'
 - c. Choose a central meeting place to congregate when emergency occurs. Define alternates based on type of emergency
 - d. Define alternative escape routes for evacuation based on specific situations, for example, fire, earthquake, flood, terrorist situation.
 - e. Map out individual neighborhoods (see Appendix Three).
 - f. Make final plans for first neighborhood meeting/social.
 - g. Prepare an invitation flyer to the first neighborhood meeting/social and ways to market it.
4. Take a survey of the residents in your neighborhood
 - a. Go out in teams of two.
 - b. Modify the information form as needed. Either complete the form while talking to them or leave the form if they request. Return at a convenient time to pick it up.
 - c. Learn neighbor's special skills (nurse, paramedic, carpenter, etc.).
 - d. Learn their critical needs (non-ambulatory, use of special equipment, etc.).
 - e. Leave educational info and invitation to first neighborhood social
 - f. Add information about the homes themselves.
 - i. Record location of gas, water, and electric shutoffs.
 - ii. *Understand* manual operation of garage door if there is one.
 - iii. Note specific fire dangers, such as wooden shingle roofs and location of vegetation known to be flammable.
 - g. Note availability of special tools for use in emergencies, for example, chain saws, generators (size), crow bars, ground well, etc.
5. Identify a potential ham radio operator; either licensed or unlicensed who is willing to take additional training to become licensed.

These five steps can be accomplished in *about* four to twelve weeks.

Next Step

1. Neighborhood Social
 - a. Introduce neighborhood leaders.
 - b. Review results of surveys.
 - c. Distribute neighborhood map and roster.
 - d. Discuss central meeting place and escape routes.
 - e. Discuss team actions when emergency occurs.
 - f. Discuss use of Walkie-Talkies, GMRS, or FRS radios.
 - g. Distribute suggested supply list, emergency guidelines and home preparedness steps.
 - h. Discuss important safety information.
2. Send neighborhood survey results to Sonoma County Community Preparedness Team and local Fire Officials.

Ongoing Efforts

Update survey information for new residents in your neighborhood:

1. Review survey every six months for changes in residents, their needs and capabilities.
2. Review your planned meeting place and escape routes every six months.
3. Inform residents of changes, if any.

Things to Consider

- **Create a telephone tree** with two names and telephone numbers for each person. Give callers a script of exactly what the message is—meeting place/time, change in plans, etc., email messaging, Facebook group, social media, *and/or* neighborhood website (www.nextdoor.com).
- **Organize a block party** once a year or picnic at nearby park—a fun time for all families in the neighborhood and a way to build social networks.
- **Coordinate for a large BBQ (potluck) or picnic** for several communities if COPEs are developed in your neighboring areas.
- **Review general preparedness** two times a year.

Conducting COPE Neighborhood Meetings

At the COPE Neighborhood meeting the COPE Neighborhood Leader should share the information in this guide, answer residents' questions, and determine who from the team should participate in a walk-around of the neighborhood to spot important details and factors for the group to consider. The COPE Neighborhood Leaders will also provide information about: Emergency Preparedness Kit, Preparing Yourself At Home, Earthquake Awareness, Survey Form, Team Roster, Neighborhood Map, and Away-From-Home Notice sheets for each household. Much of this can be found in the Your Neighborhood COPE Booklet.

Stress the following to the COPE Neighborhood Team:

1. Know the best evacuation routes from each room, your home, and the neighborhood. Have a primary and secondary choice for each.
2. Know where your designated COPE Neighborhood Team meeting site is in your neighborhood and outside the neighborhood.
3. Know which Fire Station is closest to your location to obtain assistance and to provide updates on your neighborhood.
4. Know where your utility shutoffs (gas, electricity and water) are located and how to turn them off. Caution residents to *NOT* turn off gas except in a real emergency when you smell natural gas or hear a gas leak. If it is turned off, the gas company will need to come out to turn the gas back on.
5. Know how to open garage doors manually if power is off. If neighbors are unable to raise the door manually, create solutions to provide assistance or alternate evacuation options.
6. When an emergency occurs, use the phone tree to contact residents or go to the COPE Neighborhood Team meeting site for roll call. If residents are not present, a team of at least two COPE members can go, if safe, to check on them. Remember that COPE members own safety comes first; never jeopardize anyone's safety.
7. Prior (based on early warning), if safe, get cars out of the garage and park them on the street in the direction that has been determined the best evacuation route.
8. Have an emergency response plan and emergency preparedness kit.
9. Your COPE Team Leader will collect and summarize information from your neighborhood to relay to emergency responders.
10. Review and update your survey, contact information, individual plans, emergency supply kit, smoke detector and battery-operated devices each spring and fall when you change your clocks.

Note: Do not expect every neighbor to participate at the start of your first survey. Sometimes it takes time for neighbors to share information related to themselves, their families, or their homes with others.

Meeting Ideas

Make gatherings fun and interactive. Allow members to lead and suggest activities that are meaningful to them. Here are some ideas to get your group started.

Activities:

- Have each member introduce themselves and offer a fun fact about them or their family.
- Emergency kit food tasting: granola bars, freeze dried foods, etc.
- Have a scavenger hunt to find key landmarks and obstacles in your neighborhood.
- Do team building activities to create social cohesion. Here are some ideas: sixth.ucsd.edu/_files/_home/student-life/community-building-activities.pdf
- Play emergency preparedness knowledge games, bingo, etc.

Education:

- Go garage to garage and open each manually.
- Bring in Community Emergency Preparedness Team Member or a local fire official to provide education.
- Do a fire extinguisher demo.
- Have neighbors share their preparedness kit strategies. Give small prizes for best kits, flashlights, ideas, etc.

Use lots of different meeting notifications: signage, emails, flyers, and word of mouth.

Be sure to let the Sonoma County Community Preparedness Program Team know your dates so they can add and publicize through county Department of Emergency Management media tools.

Suggested Educational Topics

- Special needs of residents in your neighborhood
- Defensible space, vegetation management, and home hardening
- Emergency notification: SoCoAlert, Nixel, Wireless Emergency Alert
- Evacuation: Local routes, community meeting space, evacuation center
- Individual/family emergency plans, go bags, check lists, pet plan
- Neighborhood communications: Phone tree, air horns, sirens, radios
- Managing burn piles
- Medical aid: First aid, CPR, psychological first aid
- Understanding red flag warnings
- Preventing fires in your home and use of a fire extinguisher
- Contact list with out-of-state contact
- Important papers, photos—irreplaceable vs. irresponsible

COPE Neighborhood Leader Duties & Responsibilities

The role of the COPE Neighborhood Leader is to provide COPE program guidance and emergency preparedness information for their neighborhood. When a COPE community exists the Neighborhood Leader also represents their neighborhood within the COPE community and serves as a point person to their community leader and local first responders as needed.

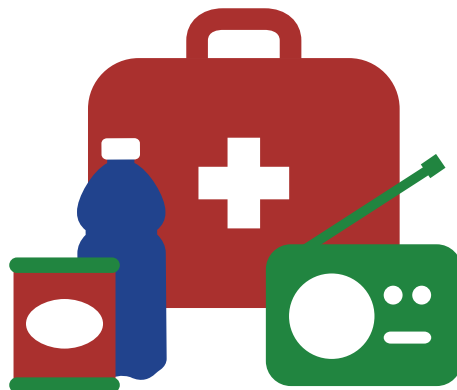
Developing a Community of COPE

First Steps

- Select 1 or 2 Community Leaders.
- Identify COPE Neighborhood Leaders that will be part of the new COPE Community.
- Contact local fire officials to establish relationship.

COPE Community Meetings

- Introduce COPE community and neighborhood leaders and fire officials.
- Explain importance of COPE program: Neighbor helping neighbor, communication among neighbors, and first responders.
- Identify gaps in the neighborhood COPE program coverage and strategize how to develop COPE groups in those areas.
- Discuss specific dangers in your community and mitigation and defensive strategies.
- Collaborate to develop educational topics: Home hardening, defensible space, etc.
- Obtain surveys from attendees to create a community data group to share with local first responders.
- Develop a map and data for your neighborhood that can be shared with other neighbors.



COPE Community Leader Duties & Responsibilities

The COPE Community Leader provides leadership for the COPE program and educational information for a local geographic area or region. In this role they will represent their community as it relates to other local and regional COPE organizations. They also will serve as a representative for their community to local emergency services including Fire, Sheriff, local law enforcement, County Emergency Services, Regional Steering Committees and any other professional organizations for emergency preparedness related issues and events.

Basic Duties

1. The leader assists in the collection and collating of survey information for each neighborhood in the community particularly the data requested by local first responders.
2. The community leader provides neighborhood leaders with COPE and other relevant educational information as it relates to their community being prepared for emergencies.
3. During an emergency, the community leader (as they are safely able) may provide information about their local COPE community and provide other assistance as directed by first responders.

Extended Duties or Opportunities

The Leader coordinates periodic educational opportunities for the team members in conjunction with local emergency professionals.

The Leader (with the neighborhood leaders) will organize and hold 1-2 meetings per year for the community at large. For example, one at the start of fire season, focusing on fire prevention, and a second at the end of fire season, recapping fire season and focusing on other types of emergency preparedness.

COPE Community Leader Meetings

First Steps

- Select 1 or 2 Community Leaders.
- Identify COPE Neighborhood Leaders.
- Contact local fire officials to establish relationship.
- Map neighborhoods.
- Review and amend COPE survey to meet community needs.
- Plan first community meeting and ways to advertise the meeting (email, signs, etc.).
- Determine ongoing meeting schedule, topics for discussion, educational needs, etc.

Ongoing Meetings

- Introduce new neighborhood leaders.
- Distribute neighborhood map outlining COPE neighborhoods.
- Strategize how to increase resident engagement and survey information.
- Collate completed survey data (see excel spreadsheet).
- Create a communication plan among Leaders, Leaders and residents, and Community Leaders and emergency personnel.
- Discuss team actions when emergency occurs.
- Identify community educational needs and develop plan to provide.
- Discuss central meeting place in an emergency and potential evacuation routes.

Developed by Northern Sonoma County Leadership Group

Resources Available for COPE Communities

Those involved in COPE are a great source of advice and assistance in starting or re-energizing a neighborhood group. Many have resources and data bases for use by others. Additionally Sonoma County is home to a diverse group of neighborhood groups with different focuses within preparedness. These other groups are also a rich source of ideas and information.

See SoCoEmergency.org/home/prepare/community-preparedness for a list and contact information for other COPE groups as well as other types of neighborhood preparedness groups and their contact information.

Local Fire Departments and Law Enforcement Agencies are a source of expert help for COPES. Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management will also support COPE groups. For example, the department is able to provide topical speakers for meetings as available and has printed materials on a variety of topics.

Other sources of information:

Ready.gov/neighbors

Ready.gov/community-preparedness-toolkit

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APPENDIX ONE: Sample Introduction Letter to Neighbors

Dear Neighbor:

This letter is to introduce you to the COPE (Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies) Program, a program that has been adopted by the County of Sonoma. Following a major disaster, it might be several days before vital services are restored in Sonoma County.

First responders who provide fire and medical services may not be able to meet the demand for these services. Factors such as number of victims, communication failures, and road blockages will prevent people from accessing emergency services. *We will have to rely on each other for help in order to meet our immediate life-saving and life-sustaining needs.* The mission of COPE is to help neighbors, families, and neighborhoods become better prepared to respond to and recover from emergency situations.

We have established a small neighborhood area for our COPE group. We ask that each household complete a *Neighbor Emergency Information or Census Form* (attached) so that we can better help each other in case of an emergency. Return the form to your neighborhood leader at _____.

Completing the form is totally voluntary. By volunteering information about special knowledge, skills and equipment, residents are under no obligation to share any knowledge, skills, or equipment under any condition.

The benefits of participating in the COPE program are:

- Be better informed about emergencies or the risk of an emergency.
- Get information about how to protect your family and property in an emergency.
- Communicate with emergency personnel about any special circumstances in your household.
- Get involved in a community that is ready for emergencies and willing to help each other when needed.

Please join us in becoming better prepared to COPE with emergencies!

Sincerely,

COPE Committee Co-Chairs

APPENDIX TWO: Sample Map

You can hand draw a map of your neighborhood or print one from Google. Once you have identified the houses for your COPE, assign the identifying addresses and start your COPE Roster. Your neighborhood may look very different if you are in a more rural setting with lots of land between homes.



As your Neighborhood COPE program develops, this map could be expanded to include contact information and locations of utilities for each resident.



APPENDIX THREE: Activity Template

This template is for neighborhood use to organize action activities deemed valuable to the local area. Each COPE will have special circumstances and needs, but this provides a way to organize thoughts into actions.

Activity Name

Describe activity.	
What are the steps to implementation?	
Under what circumstances should the activity be used?	
Who should implement it?	
What information, equipment, preparation, training, etc. is needed before implementing?	
Is any oversight by fire or public safety officials needed? If so, who?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, who:
What is the expected outcome?	
What information or data is available to support the use of this activity?	
List any resources (such as links to equipment or online information).	
Evaluation: Was implementation of the activity successful? What changes should be made to the activity?	

APPENDIX FOUR: Sample Activity

Red Flag Warning

Describe activity	The purpose of this activity is to increase awareness of extreme fire danger in our communities. A Red Flag warning is issued when weather conditions over the next 12-72 hours are expected to include low relative humidity (<20%) and strong winds (>15 MPH) in the setting of dry fuels. Increased elevations (above 1000 feet) are at highest risk. Sometimes a Fire Weather Watch is issued before a Red Flag Warning. PG&E may issue de-energization warnings based on these conditions.
What are the steps to implementation?	There are a number of ways that COPE leaders and others can increase awareness of red flag warnings such as contacting residents and providing information via email distribution lists or phone trees, raising red flags for the warning period, etc. If red flags are raised they must be removed at the end of the red flag warning period.
Under what circumstances should the activity be used?	When a Red Flag warning is issued by the National Weather Service
Who should implement it?	COPE Leaders and residents, local fire officials
What information, equipment, preparation, training, etc. is needed before implementing?	<p>Before implementing, one should understand the meaning of a Red Flag warning and have a plan for informing residents, be capable of providing education regarding fire prevention, possible de-energization, and advance preparation for evacuation if fire should occur.</p> <p>Suggested Equipment: Red Flags: Anley “Fly Breeze” 3’ by 5’ polyester at approx. Poles: 4’ in several diameters to go with your flag holder bracket. Flag Holder Bracket—in several sizes to work with your poles</p> <p>Basic plastic swift attachments to hold/pierce the flag (through the grommets) and attach it to the pole</p> <p>(See list on Amazon)</p> <p>Regular updates about possible de-energization and fire alerts</p>

APPENDIX FOUR: Sample Activity

Red Flag Warning (continued)

Is any oversight by fire or public safety officials needed? If so, who?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, who:
What is the expected outcome?	Increased awareness of fire risk, increased preparedness and avoidance of high-risk fire activities; advance warning for possible de-energization.
What information or data is available to support the use of this activity?	SoCo Alerts
List any resources (such as links to equipment or online information).	NWS Warnings & Advisories What you should do
Evaluation: Was implementation of the activity successful? What changes should be made to the activity? How will you measure success?	Measures of success: Neighbors notice red flags and ask for fire prevention information; less evidence of charcoal fires, use of heavy equipment, and more removal of vegetation around homes on red flag days; preparedness activities in advance of possible de-energization

APPENDIX FIVE:
Sample COPE Phone Tree and Organizational Chart

