

2007 Gibson City Community Guide Article

Gibson City Emergency Response Team – GCERT Commission

In April of 2006, Mayor Daniel Dickey appointed 15 volunteers to serve on a new committee called GCERT. The purpose of this committee was to investigate our community preparedness for emergency situations. Members of this committee included Don Jones (Ford County ESDA), Chuck Aubry (GCMS Superintendent of Schools), Barb Meyer (Gibson City Hospital Emergency Director), Dan Dickey (Mayor of Gibson City), Linda Jackson (City Dispatcher), Jeff Volker (Fire Chief), Joe Higgins (Gibson City Hospital Safety Director), Steve Cushman (Chief of Police), Kenneth Mills (City Alderman), Randy Stauffer (City Superintendent of Public Works), Gary Petersen (Gibson City Hospital CEO), Marty Nuss (IPG Insurance Agency), Karen Moore (University of Illinois Extension), Jim Killian (WGCY Radio) and Bruce Hammitt (GCERT Chairman).

The GCERT team started work in April. They divided into small groups to investigate various areas of concern; including weather, communications, hazmat plans, public emergency preparedness education, emergency volunteers, etc. The GCERT committee met monthly with small groups giving their reports and recommendations were discussed and recorded.

During the next six months the GCERT committee accomplished many valuable tasks. They received 1,500 “Preparing for Disaster” pamphlets from the American Red Cross and got them distributed throughout the community. Presentations were given to the Chamber of Commerce on business emergency measures. Ford County ESDA director Don Jones conducted an introduction to NIMS (National Incident Management Systems) class for 20 people. Lists were developed of sources available within Gibson City, Ford County and Illinois for emergency situations and contact help. Mutual Aid agreements were solidified with Paxton and Fairbury. The City Council Chambers were designated as the community “EOC” (Emergency Operations Center) with phone, NOAA radio, television and computer, desk, city map, communications radios, desk with all emergency information, etc. The Grade School tornado drill plan was reviewed with a few improvements made. A storm siren activation drill was conducted and results analyzed to make improvements. Gibson City Hospital conducted two days of HazMat training for their staff and invited GCERT members to attend sessions. City department head responsibilities were listed and approved along with a list of standard operational procedures for each department. A business survey on emergency preparedness was conducted and reviewed. Lists of all railroads and gas pipelines that run through and around Gibson City were made with their emergency phone numbers listed. A 10 page emergency situation guide was printed and distributed to all business owners. The Gibson City Hospital worked with GCERT to write and conduct a community emergency drill. This project was coordinated by Barb Meyer and involved GCERT members, Hospital staff, School officials, City Police, Fire and Public Works, and volunteers.

In October of 2006 GCERT presented the City Council with 138 page Emergency/Disaster Resource Guide. Each GCERT member attended the council meeting and reported their activity and accomplishments. The City Council passed an ordinance making GCERT an official commission of the city. New commission members appointed were Paula Johnson (Heritage Manor) & Todd Pondel (Assistant Fire Chief).

In December a severe weather committee was formed within GCERT to investigate plans for power outages that could create emergency situations for people who did not have back up heating or cooling. Arrangements were made with several facilities to provide shelter during severe weather conditions.

The GCERT Commission held its first meeting in January of 2007. Each of the ten commission members was assigned a topic area for continued review and improvement. 32 GCERT consultants were enlisted to serve on the ten committees.

In April of 2007 The American Red Cross of the Heartland opened an office at our City Hall. The office is open on Monday and Thursday and is run by directorCarolynne Saffer. The American Red Cross has teamed with GCERT to work on evacuation centers, safety classes, volunteer training, etc. They have also worked with the Gibson City Hospital to coordinate training efforts in the area.

GCERT hosted a railroad emergency training session with instructors from Norfolk Southern and Canadian National Railroads making presentations. 90 area emergency responders from 8 communities attended this free training session held at the Lutheran Church. In March, GCERT hosted a Storm Spotter training session. Mr. Jim Allsopp from the Romeoville National Weather Service conducted the two hour course held at the Gibson City Moose Lodge. 94 area responders and citizens attended this training session.

Gibson City received an award from the National Weather Service being recognized as A Storm Ready Community. This award is presented to communities that have proven they have adopted all of the storm ready procedures that are required by NWS.

The GCERT Commission is always actively seeking citizens who wish to be involved with emergency preparedness and response activities. We have accomplished many tasks that have improved our community safety, but there is much work yet to be done. We recognize that HOPE IS NOT A PLAN. If you wish to get involved with our work please call City Hall at 784-5872 and let them know you want to help.