

## from Archives: Hermosa Beach News

### Preparedness survey results

by **Eric Michael Stitt**

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A year after its formation, Hermosa Beach's Emergency Preparedness Advisory Commission finally has an idea of how ready citizens are for a man-made or natural disaster.

The commission was created at the request of Kelly Kovac-Reedy and Tracy Hopkins to help prepare Hermosa Beach residents and business owners for such tragedies as an earthquake, terrorist attack, flooding, a toxic cloud, pandemic flu, a tsunami or severe weather.

Kovac-Reedy and Hopkins, who run the Neighborhood Watch program, received support from City Manager Steve Burrell to form the commission and received approval from the City Council in June of 2007.

There are seven people on the commission, which meets monthly, and over the last year they have spent their time meeting with water companies, police and fire chiefs, health departments, local hospital officials, the Red Cross and other organizations that would be used in the event of a catastrophe.

A goals list was created for subcommittees to work on various projects; one of those was to develop the Hermosa Beach Amateur Radio Association. This gives people an opportunity to still communicate with each other if a disaster should knock out power or telephone service.

Another item on that goals list was to have as many residents as possible take a survey that would inform the EPAC exactly how prepared Hermosa Beach is for tragedy. The survey was available online and in paper form for six weeks from May to June and the EPAC recently got the results, which showed that this commission is needed.



In preparation for National Firefighter Health Week, Hermosa Beach firefighters walk along the Strand with personal trainer Nicole Fusco.

Since the EPAC educates and trains people about what to do during a disaster, the survey included random questions that ranged from do you know how to use a fire extinguisher, do you have stored water, to do you know how to shut off the gas valve in your house.

"We got a real good idea of where we need to focus and what people do in time of crisis," Kovac-Reedy said.

There were 326 residents who took the survey. Thirty-two percent of those people were 55 years or older, 25 percent between 45 and 55, 37 percent between the ages of 30 and 44, and 18-to 29-year-olds made up 6 percent. The research showed that Hermosa Beach residents scored 3.2 out of 10 for disaster readiness.

Some of the key results showed that seven out of 10 people, or 69 percent, don't know how to find an emergency broadcast channel. Four of 10 people have a prepared emergency kit and eight out of 10, or 84 percent of people, do not have a meeting place to reunite with family members if a disaster were to occur.

"We've realized the city as a whole needs to be prepared," Hopkins said. "We'll take this as an opportunity to educate residents."

Hopkins used the recent Los Angeles earthquake as an example that disasters can happen without warning and people must be prepared. She said people didn't know that phones calls might be blocked because of high usage, but text messages could still be sent immediately after the quake. That's just one example of something that most people should know and EPAC is taking the responsibility to educate people about such things.

Burrell said he's always wanted the city to have an emergency plan and information for residents, but that could never be accomplished because city staff doesn't have the time. So when Hopkins and Kovac-Reedy asked him about forming a volunteer commission, he was thrilled with the idea.

"It's always something I was interested in," Burrell said. "The group has been a resource to the city. If a disaster of some sort happens, we need to be able to help people."

Kovac-Reddy said there is so much information out there to educate

people about disaster preparedness that its necessary to have a commission such as the EPAC and they're looking forward to pinpointing their focus on how to improve residents' readiness now that the survey results are final.

Hopkins said seeing the horrible aftermaths resulting from hurricanes around the Gulf of Mexico, earthquakes in China and a tsunami near Indonesia have been big motivators for the EPAC to work with city departments and residents to make sure a tragedy like that doesn't destroy the city.

"We saw what can happen and we can never have that happen in Hermosa Beach," Hopkins said.