

Wayland CERT Team Participates in Concord Shelter Exercise

By Gary Slep, Wayland CERT

Saturday was a big day in Concord for emergency service training. The Concord police and fire departments conducted one of their periodic emergency drills while the Concord Mass Shelter Team held its first operational drill since the group was formed in 2004. The shelter drill brought more than sixty team members and volunteers out on a chilly November morning. The exercise was held at the Concord-Carlisle High School where participants ran through a series of drills simulating real conditions that might befall the community if a natural disaster struck the region. The Concord team organized the event and drew support from the Red Cross, Concord firefighters and EMTs, and a mass shelter team from neighboring Wayland.

The purpose of the exercise was to familiarize team members with a shelter environment, logistics, and shelter operations. The planners also wanted to find out what procedures work well and which do not, to detect any planning or operational flaws, and to plan improvements for future drills. Management priorities were to simulate providing a roof and shelter from the elements to evacuees, feeding them, and maintaining their health. Shelter managers Dottie Bernard from Concord and Joseph Boykin from Wayland exchanged valuable ideas during the exercises.



Wayland CERT members Joseph Boykin, Joseph Gordon, and Karen Wise help with registration.

Wayland's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) actively participated in the exercises by working with Concord volunteers at the registration and information tables, helping in the disaster health and client services areas, exchanging observations and suggestions with the Concord team members, and participating as "victims."

Among the scenarios practiced during the drills were a severe winter storm and the arrival of a busload of school children and nursing home evacuees. Throughout the drills, team leaders rotated Wayland and Concord members and volunteers among a variety of functions so that each person could gain experience in multiple shelter management roles. Among the key functions and simulations run during the exercises were registration, information services, health and distress counseling, triage,

safety and security, dining services, radio operations, dormitory management, and shelter discharge.

Many community residents participated in the drill. School children from Concord were given elementary instruction and practice in CPR. They assisted at various tables handing out forms. The students also helped by serving as runners for the shelter team.

Volunteer shelter "clients," including the elderly, arrived on site to test the skills of the shelter team. Some clients arrived without knowing the whereabouts of their relatives; others arrived with their pets. Some clients were distressed because of the storm, because they had lost communication with loved ones, or because they did not have their medications with them. Some clients had injuries; others had medications that needed to be secured by the shelter safety officer. Some elderly clients simulated medical conditions, such as blackened feet, that tested the skills and training of various volunteers.



While Gary Slep, Wayland's CERT Safety Officer, exchanged ideas with Jim Boyd – his counterpart in Concord – Joseph Gordon, Wayland's CERT Operations Section Chief, swapped ideas with his Concord and Red Cross counterparts. The Wayland team found themselves integrated for the first time with the Concord team, with both teams functioning readily as a single unit. This was one of the most gratifying results of this

drill – it proved that local teams could come together as a regional resource and work together like a well-oiled machine because they have the same training and use the same terminology.

In a real disaster lasting for days, tasks would have to be performed that were not simulated during the November 18th drill, such as actually cooking for a large crowd, bedding them down during a stressful period, or providing comfort and entertainment for small children, teenagers, and adults for several days. Those simulations will have to wait for a future drill. This test was to provide insight on the teams' ability to conduct the most basic steps of shelter management. To that end, the test proved, by all measures, successful.

Red Cross guidelines for shelter management staffing are 14 volunteers per each 200 persons sheltered. If you are interested in becoming a shelter volunteer, contact the Concord or Wayland team. Local shelter management is a component of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Concord and Wayland each have a CERT organization. For more information on the Wayland CERT, contact Gale McNiff (508-655-9284) or go to the group's website: <http://www.waylandcert.org>. To join Wayland's CERT shelter team, contact Joseph Boykin at boykin@waylandcert.org.

Prepared 11/20/06