

# **League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes**

## **Office of Emergency Management Consensus**

**March 2003**

The League recognizes and commends the Borough and the Mountain Lakes School District for their efforts to prepare our community for a wide range of emergency situations. The League strongly encourages the Borough to sustain the current level of commitment to emergency planning and preparedness, even when there is not a heightened sense of alert. The League recommends that the Borough's Office of Emergency Management augment its practices beyond the state-mandated appointment of an Emergency Management Coordinator, the formation of a Local Emergency Planning Committee that meets annually, and the preparation of an Office of Emergency Manual that is updated every two years. The League further recommends that the school district implement additional emergency procedures and communicate these procedures to parents.

The League suggests augmenting the current practices in the following areas:

### **Office of Emergency Management and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)**

The League encourages expanding the mission and activities of the Office of Emergency Management and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to include the following:

- a. Evaluate and plan for emergencies in high-risk facilities in Mountain Lakes as well as in neighboring communities and include these plans in a dedicated section of the Office of Emergency Management manual
- b. Meet with LEPC's in surrounding communities to help identify and coordinate planning for high-risk facilities, work to share resources in the event of an emergency, and facilitate evacuation of the greater area
- c. Conduct frequent tabletop exercises (at least annually) and include live drills – possibly with residents
- d. Evaluate and ensure that all Mountain Lakes emergency responders are properly trained for their assigned role
- e. Confirm plans for communication among health professionals, the Emergency Management Coordinator and the public. Obtain information on how health-related emergencies are handled, in particular, how the distribution of medication and vaccines would be carried out in Mountain Lakes
- f. Expand the current LEPC to include additional representatives, such as industry, media, and local community group members.

### **Resident Preparation for an Emergency**

The League strongly recommends the use of simple communication tools, routine practices and training to prepare residents to act quickly and effectively before and during an emergency and to minimize confusion. The League also encourages the use of our residents' skills. Suggestions include:

- a. Distribute a "citizens guide to emergency management" with simple, "user-friendly" layout and language, explaining how residents are informed of emergencies and what they should do, and not do, in an emergency situation. Consider including this information in the Mountain Lakes Resident Telephone Directory that is updated yearly
- b. Distribute to all residents a refrigerator magnet containing basic emergency information such as the siren alert system and the radio station that provides emergency information to this area

- c. Hold town meetings and/or resident information nights to discuss emergency plans
- d. Designate town information centers where residents can go to receive information during an emergency
- e. Designate one house or "point person" per neighborhood as a source for information during an emergency
- f. Include emergency information in the borough newsletter
- g. Form a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in Mountain Lakes, including advertising for its volunteers
- h. Advertise for volunteer resident (active and retired) health professionals and service professionals who would be willing to assist the town during an emergency, e.g., to vaccinate residents and/or provide non-health related services
- i. Register special needs residents within Mountain Lakes, including residents who are handicapped and hearing impaired
- j. Register residents who live, work, or go to school out of town and may need a means to communicate with the town in the event of an emergency.

### **Borough-to-Resident Communication During an Emergency**

The League commends the Borough for the methods of communication that are currently in place, including town-wide sirens, bullhorns, police car loudspeakers, door-to-door notifications and posting public information on the Mountain Lakes website. The League recommends that the Borough utilize a "toolbox" of various low-tech and high-tech communication systems so that there is a backup if one system is unavailable.

As part of this toolbox, the League recommends that the Office of Emergency Management implement a dedicated emergency alert device with the capability of town-wide dissemination of information separate from our current siren warning system. The League also recommends that the Borough consider methods to communicate with residents who are out of town during an emergency. The League suggests conducting a cost/benefit analysis of various alternative communication systems, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. A limited-service AM-frequency radio station dedicated to Mountain Lakes emergency information
- b. Sirens with voice messaging capabilities
- c. "Call-back" systems such as Reverse 911 or CAN, and consider sharing the system among the Borough, the schools and other communities
- d. "Email-back" systems, which entail registering all residents' email addresses and forwarding emergency information to all addresses simultaneously. This would be particularly useful in getting in touch with residents working outside of Mountain Lakes.

### **Mountain Lakes Schools**

The League commends the Mountain Lakes School District for its commitment to emergency planning and preparedness. The League recognizes the significance of these efforts, including lockdown drills and the implementation of a private high-frequency radio system for communication within and among the schools and with the Police. The League recommends that the school district continue working with the Borough, the Police and the Office of Emergency Management on preparation, drills and training of faculty and staff.

The League strongly recommends that the school district make school-to-parent communication of the district's emergency plans a priority. The communication should include not only the school's internal emergency plans, but also the role parents should play in the event of a school-based emergency. Suggestions for the school district include:

- a. Working together with the Borough

- i. Prepare a "citizens guide to emergency management"
  - ii. Designate a single town information center where parents and residents can go to receive information during an emergency
  - iii. Participate in the analysis of alternative communication systems such as a limited-service AM-frequency radio station, sirens with voice messaging, and "call-back" and "email-back" systems for use in Mountain Lakes
- b. Implement a script using a "common language" that the staff and phone chain use to communicate with parents during an emergency
- c. Hold parent information nights on emergency planning and response and include parents in drills
- d. Post school emergency information on the Mountain Lakes website
- e. Provide frequent reminders to parents to update their emergency contact-card information.