

Salt Spring Community Alliance and CRD Director

Emergency Preparedness Community Consultation Meeting Notes

Feb 25, 2019

Lions Hall, Salt Spring Island

The Salt Spring Community Alliance and Gary Holman, the CRD Director for Salt Spring Island collaborated on a recent community meeting to enable the public to debrief and learn lessons from recent island-wide emergencies such as the windstorm in Dec 2018 and the large snow fall in February 2019, which saw power outages and road blocks for up to 2 weeks across the Island.

Representatives of local emergency service agencies were present at the meeting, but the process of debriefing was based on hearing from community members who shared both the positive/successful outcome of these emergencies, along with suggestions for how future improvements could be made at three levels: a) Personal/household level b) Neighbourhood level and c) Emergency Service Agency level (Fire Depts., Hydro, Main Road Services, Emergency Operations Centre, POD program, Search and Rescue, etc.).

This report breaks down the successes and challenges at each level, and will be distributed to all emergency service agencies for their review.

Personal/Neighbourhood Level Successes

- Phone was working thanks to extra chargers and using cars for charging
- Food stores were ample enough not to cause excess concern.
- Used solar camping lights
- Learned about septic malfunction with power outage, had to bucket out overflow from bathtub
- Able to cook and stay warm with fireplace, woodstove, camping stoves.
- Off island storage for frozen food was helpful, as was the sharing of generators.

Personal/Neighbourhood Level: Suggestions for Future Improvements

- Try to develop back up communication systems for when landlines, cell service and/or internet are down
- Use diverse media outlets to gain information (Radio, Facebook, SS Exchange, Gov't: CRD, IT, and official websites)
- Consider walkie-talkies and learning amateur radio skills.
- Get back up chargers and wind up radio for emergencies
- Check up on isolated neighbours more often by knocking on doors

Neighbourhood Level Successes

- Neighbours came out to shovel roads and clear fallen trees to help gain access.
- Neighbours emailed and went out to check on each other, especially the more elders or needy. Maps had been made of priorities to check by the PODS.
- Neighbours came out to clear roads by cutting fallen trees out of the way with chainsaws
- Lots of food was shared for an impromptu Christmas dinner
- Email threads were helpful to keep up to date with current conditions
- Many trades people in neighbourhoods helped out with plowing, clearing, shovelling, chain-sawing etc.
- Neighbours and friends were helpful in offering to share their homes for showers, heat, charging, water.
- Neighbours lent out generators to others.
- POD members were able to replicate duties of vacationing pod leaders (enough to relocate a party!)
- Neighbours felt connected and cared for by each other in many areas
- Stratas are also connected in PODS
- Emergency services notices for PODS were good

Neighbourhood Level: Suggestions for Future Improvements

- Bulletin boards in a central neighbourhood spot would be helpful for those without internet or phone communications
- Some neighbourhoods would benefit from a POD group, as they are not yet organized
- Some neighbourhoods (i.e.: Garner Rd) would like official MOTI signs asking people not to leave cars parked on roadway causing dangerous conditions during snow falls, as it prevents plows from doing their work
- PODS should ensure critical info and supplies are available or replicated in case leaders are not available or on vacation.
- Radio stn. can be used better to access information- local morning program on GICRS (on internet so far, radio hopefully soon)

Emergency Service Agency Level Successes

- SS Road Report on Facebook was a key source of information- good posting of current conditions
- Glad's Ice Cream offered use of freezers to store food
- Moby's Pub, the Library and other locations in town were helpful for access to charging stations for phones, etc.
- BC Hydro reinforcements worked long and hard (4am photo to prove it)
- Warming centres in town and around were critical
- Snow cleaning was done well and thoughtfully
- Swimming pool showers were helpful

- SAR rescued a woman from her home - communications rerouted to Hospital emergency
- EOC (Emergency Operations Centre) phone network open during windstorm to deal with extra emergencies
- SAR went door to door to ensure boil water advisories were received
- Copper Kettle offered extra shower tokens
- People dug out fire hydrants in case of emergencies
- Great resilience (compared to some parts of New Orleans)
- Few vehicle crashes (way to stay home!)
- Mostly people respected downed power lines
- Roads were well cleared for access after a few days.
- EOC phone network was able to assist good allocation of resources
- Legion warming centre was welcomed to various other locations.

Emergency Service Agency Level: Suggestions for Future Improvements

- 911 didn't know about activities here because of rerouted calls
- Ambulance should have 4-wheel drive, as there was an incident they could not respond to due to snow.
- www.drivebc.ca road reports could be better utilized and updated
- Radio Station in the works will be helpful. CREST radio tower at Legion would be helpful
- Is putting hydro underground feasible? Answer is No.
- Warn community to be aware of when power comes back on- what was left on that could be a hazard?
- Amateur radio network is expanding
- EOC could connect better to HAM Radio and amateur operators and diversify communication network
- Encouragement and Education for personal responsibility to endure emergencies to then be able to help others.
- PODs to connect better with each other to compare notes and co-support.
- Traffic flagging training might be helpful (or dangerous)
- Encourage promotion of alternatives to burning fallen branches- CRD Chipping program? Mar 9th deadline for Fire smart grant for groups.
- More public education for the hazards of fallen power lines- keep a bus length away, do not drive over!
- Improve plowing budget and capacity for emergencies- extra funds for private operators?
- Local Spokesperson (Gov't or other) updates daily would be a comfort.
- Better downtown sidewalk clearing would be helpful
- Encourage sleds to be available for ambulance/emergency evacuation at inaccessible households
- Clarity around PANS and other alert networks needed – more public education
- Encourage community members to engage with or start local PODS.
- Plan for inevitable effects of climate change.

Emergency Agency Specific Suggestions for Future Improvements

BC Hydro

- BC Hydro reinforcements worked long and hard (4am photo to prove it)
- Warn community to be aware of when power comes back on- what was left on that could be a hazard?
- More public education for the hazards of fallen power lines- keep a bus length away, do not drive over!

Main Road

- Snow cleaning was done well and thoughtfully
- Official MOTI signs should be posted asking people not to leave cars parked on roadway causing dangerous conditions during snow storms
- Improve plowing budget and capacity for emergencies - extra funds for private operators?
- www.drivebc.ca road reports could be better utilized

CRD

- Swimming pool showers were helpful
- Improve plowing budget and capacity for emergencies - extra funds for private operators?
- Encourage promotion of alternatives to burning fallen branches - CRD Chipping program?
- Local Spokesperson (Gov't or other) updates daily would be a comfort.

SAR and EOC

- SAR rescued a woman from her home - communications rerouted to Hospital emergency
- EOC (Emergency Operations Centre) phone network open during windstorm to deal with extra emergencies
- SAR went door to door to ensure boil water advisories were received
- EOC phone network was able to assist good allocation of resources
- EOC could connect better to HAM Radio and amateur operators and diversify communication network
- Clarity around PANS and other alert networks needed
- More encouragement for community members to engage with or start local PODs.

RCMP, Ambulance, and Fire

- 911 didn't know about activities here because of rerouted calls
- Ambulance should have 4 wheel drive, as they got stuck in the snow when responding to a call out.