



# CHRISTMAS TREE HILL Neighborhood Response Group

## Block Captain & Zone Coordinator Training Manual

*How to prepare and what to do when a disaster strikes*



*“Every person who prepares is one less person who panics in a crisis.”  
Mike Adamson, British Red Cross*

This Training Manual is a work-in-progress and it will be updated and modified based on feedback from Zone Coordinators and Block Captains, best practices, lessons learned from others and drills. If you have suggestions or requests for updates, corrections or additions to the Manual, please send them to Anita Bock at [CTHNRG@gmail.com](mailto:CTHNRG@gmail.com). As updates or additional information is made available, please add it to your Manual, and remember to substitute current contact lists to your Manual at least quarterly. The most recent version of the Manual will always be available on the CTH NRG website: <https://www.cthnr.org>

### **IMPORTANT**

All Block Captains and Zone Coordinators are required to sign up for the following alerts upon assuming on their roles:

Nixle Alerts: <https://local.nixle.com/register>

Alert Marin: [www.alertmarin.org](http://www.alertmarin.org)

In addition, we urge you to:

Download the Ready for Wildfire App: <http://www.readyforwildfire.org>

Sign up for Earthquake Alerts: <http://myhazards.caloes.ca.gov>

Learn more about preparing for earthquakes at: [www.readymarin.org/plan-prepare](http://www.readymarin.org/plan-prepare)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Block Captains and Zone Coordinators serve as the crucial link between the Christmas Tree Hill Neighborhood Response Group (CTH NRG) and the individual residents of CTH. The roles require a responsible person with the time and interest to work as part of an emergency response planning team. Being at home during the day is not a prerequisite. A Block Captain or Zone Coordinator should have a reliable telephone messaging system, access to email, be highly responsive and committed to serving and assisting the residents of CTH both before, during and after a disaster.

Primary BC duties include:

- Responsibility for a manageable group of homes, usually in the range of 5-8, referred to as a 'block'.
- Meeting the residents in your assigned block, greeting new neighbors, and explaining the CTH NRG initiative and ER Plan.
- Keeping track, by means of questionnaires, of who is living in each home in the designated area and entering names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and other relevant data in the CTH NRG data base.
- Distributing and/or collecting information from residents in the block, and coordinating and handling data dissemination regarding evacuation and other emergency response procedures.
- Serving as the contact person for people in the designated block to notify about emergency response activity, and promptly notifying the CTH NRG of any relevant information.
- Participating in and helping to organize periodic (annual or biannual) emergency response drills.
- Responding to emergencies/disasters based on training provided and aiding in recovery efforts.

Becoming a Block Captain / Zone Coordinator can be a very rewarding experience: you meet neighbors you might not otherwise have met, you serve the important function of keeping people informed about emergency incidents and disasters that affect the CTH community, you provide information about how residents can protect themselves in emergencies and plan for disasters, you help to raise awareness about evacuation and other procedures and response protocols that may save lives, and most importantly, you help your neighbors in a time of great need. It is a highly visible position that is vital to the success of the CTH NRG in planning, preparing for and responding to emergencies and disasters on CTH.

**If you know of a neighbor that may be interested, please refer them to: [cthnrg@gmail.com](mailto:cthnrg@gmail.com)**

Thank you for accepting an assignment to serve your neighborhood and community as a Block Captain/Zone Coordinator. The handbook contains detailed instructions as to the role of the Block Captain, together with safety issues and tips that you can follow.

The Training Manual is written to be a guide and training tool for Block Captains and Zone Coordinators. When the words Block Captain(s) or the letters BC are used, throughout the rest of the handbook, read them to include interim, back-up or temporarily designated block captains deputized in an emergency.

Act only to the level of training you receive in this handbook or from any additional professional training that you may receive. Attempting something above and beyond that training may nullify protection under California's Good Samaritan Law<sup>1</sup>. (California Good Samaritan Laws (Health & Safety Code Section 1799.102)

## II. BLOCK CAPTAIN ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

### SECTION 1 Role and Duties

The primary role of a Block Captain (BC) is to act as the information sharer and gatherer for a specific location known as a block of homes within a designated CTH NRG Zone (CTH NRG has 7 Zones – see map) and to report findings via 2-way radio or other available means to Incident Command leaders, Zone Coordinators, or first responders during an emergency.

A Block Captain has three time periods or phases that define their duties:

1. Before the emergency/disaster – the preparation phase
2. During the emergency/disaster – the action phase
3. Following the emergency/disaster – the response and recovery phase

Make sure that you have all the necessary supplies you need, many of which are supplied by CTH NRG (see Essential BC backpack supply list). **If you need a radio, bullhorn, vest, T-shirt, clip board, forms, resident information letters, OK/HELP signs, or Stop the Bleed kits, please contact your Zone Coordinator or [CTHNRG@gmail.com](mailto:CTHNRG@gmail.com) promptly.**

### PHASE 1: Before the Emergency/Disaster - The Preparation Phase

#### Before the Disaster Strikes

Any preparations conducted prior to a disaster will greatly enhance the response capabilities of all Block Captains and residents. Prepare your own plan and your family (have go-kits, necessary emergency supplies, etc.) A key BC task involves becoming familiar with the physical area of the Block, especially its evacuation routes and any features that may affect evacuation and emergency response activity.

Block Captains should meet at least once a year with all residents of the block and discuss any preparedness strategies as well as specific neighborhood plans. All residents of the block should be aware of the CTH NRG Emergency Response Plan and ideally agree to be a part of it. Hopefully all residents will take part in the program, however, you must have the consent of each homeowner prior to acting as a block captain on their property. The annual meetings are for the Block Captain to record or update vital information about all residents/family members, for

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<sup>1</sup> "No person who in good faith, and not for compensation, renders emergency medical or nonmedical care at the scene of an emergency shall be liable for any civil damages resulting from any act or omission." The law also clarifies that a person cannot be held liable for civil damages unless their actions or omissions constitute "gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct." The law says that the intent of California Health and Safety Code Section 1799.102 is to encourage people to help each other during emergency situations, while ensuring that those who do volunteer to help act responsibly.<sup>1</sup>

example, name, age, contact information, special needs, etc., and to report the information to CTH NRG.

When visiting each resident, either initially or annually thereafter (usually before, during, or after the annual November 4<sup>th</sup> drill):

- Discuss the CTH NRG Emergency Response Plan.
- Give the resident/family ideas on what to include in a family disaster plan and go-kit and encourage them to make their plan and practice it, and to pack go-kits in the event an evacuation is ordered or an earthquake or other disaster forces them out of the home.
- Give the resident an **OK/HELP** sign and a Stop the Bleed kit.
- Ask them to fill out a confidential Resident Information Form (to be used only for CTH NRG emergency response and recovery purposes), once received, enter the data into the Resident Information Excel spreadsheet (available on the CTH NRG website [www.cthnrg.org](http://www.cthnrg.org)) and forward a copy promptly to: [CTHNRG@gmail.com](mailto:CTHNRG@gmail.com).
- Invite the resident/family to take CERT—Certified Emergency Response Training, or FADR—First Aid for Disaster Response Training and to join the CTH NRG as a volunteer.<sup>2</sup>
- With the resident's permission, walk around each house to observe and note the location of gas meters, water main connections, electrical meters, fire hydrants, large trees, flammable vegetation, types of building construction, any other things that could become hazards or useful in an emergency. Make a note of these items for your records.

Take time to identify any special needs of the residents of your block and anything else that they would like you to know that could become important after a disaster. For example, do you have a neighbor that needs oxygen, and if so, make sure they have a plan in the event that power is lost. Knowing of any special needs and ensuring that residents have contingency plans will enable you to better assist you neighbors in their time of need. You may also wish to discuss any special skills and equipment that neighbors may have that could be used in the event of a disaster, for example, are they nurses, doctors, retired police officers or fire fighters. Knowing that a neighbor has a chain saw or a truck (as well as any other tool or skill) and is willing to use it to clear fallen trees will enable neighbors to help neighbors. Be sure to document this information.

## Phase 2: During the Emergency/Disaster – The Action Phase

**Important:** Most of the instructions below relate to natural disasters like earthquakes. In wildfire situations the appropriate priority response is evacuation or shelter-in-place as directed by the police or other first responders, or via official alerts. **DO NOT attempt to do home/resident assessments or render assistance in wildfire situations until the all clear has been given.** If an evacuation warning is issued, **only if there is time** (i.e., at least 2 hours before the wildfire is expected to reach you) a BC/ZC may attempt—if they wish to and can do so safely—to notify neighbors/residents using a bullhorn or other means like a group text.

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<sup>2</sup> See Volunteer Application Form and <https://readymarin.org/cert/>; <https://www.joinmmrc.com>

During an emergency/disaster, Block Captains and Zone Coordinators are the on-the-ground observers, incident impact assessors, and information gatherers and sharers.

When describing assessments use these terms:

- **No impact.**
- **Light Impact:** For example, minor cracks in walls. Trees down but no visible structural damage. No structures at obvious risk. No serious personal injuries. No evacuation ordered. If minor fire: no structures burned, minor vegetation burned but no uncontained wildfire in block area.
- **Moderate Impact:** For example, power line(s) down. Some personal injuries, but not life-threatening. No evacuation ordered but some fire damage to house(s) in block. No homes appear to be structurally failing or completely destroyed. Contained wildfire in area(s) in or near block but all clear given to other residents. Shelter-in-place ordered but now lifted.
- **Heavy Impact:** For example, moderate impact plus one or more houses tilted, off foundations or destroyed. Life-threatening injuries to one or more persons. Uncontained wildfire in or near home/block and evacuation ordered or warning given.

- 1<sup>st</sup> - turn on your two-way radio (if you have one) and take care of yourself and family. Make sure that they are safe and secure before you turn your attention to your BC responsibilities. **If an evacuation order or warning is issued – evacuate!**
- As soon as you hear the CTH Command Center (CC) communications come on the air report in that your radio is on and you are responding to your block assignment. Be sure to use your call sign so that the Command Team (CT) can keep track of all Block Captains who are responding. Speak clearly and concisely.

*Example of a report in message is: “Command Center (or CC) - this is Zone 4 Block 5 reporting in, commencing block assessment. Over.”*

See 2-way radio instructions and call list for call signs, and whenever possible participate in radio drills. **Radio use proficiency is a vitally important skill for BCs.**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> – grab your BC backpack, bullhorn, and radio, put on your T-shirt and BC vest, go outside and as quickly as possible get an overview of the whole Block. Think about time of day, special needs residents/families, hazards (gas, fire, water), downed power lines, blocked roads, collapsed/sing buildings, other hazards. Make a note of all relevant impacts that need reporting to the CC.
- Systematically walk your block (right-hand or left-hand circuit) to avoid missing a house. Remember, you have to check each house. If you encounter someone with a serious injury call it in immediately to the CC. *Example: “CC - this is Zone 5 Block 4 reporting a medical emergency or injury: Resident at 200 Marina Vista is bleeding profusely – needs immediate medical assistance. Over.”* If you are qualified to do so and if you have something at hand to do it with (like a Stop the Bleed kit, a towel, a shirt/cloth) apply pressure to the wound and attempt first aid until help arrives. **See FADR first aid guidance.**
- Quickly fill out an **Impact Assessment Form** at each house. Use this as a checklist to make sure that nothing is overlooked. Be sure to account for each resident/family member. Circle those missing on the form.
- Flag each house assessed so that the sign is easily visible from the road, if it is not already flagged (**OK** – if no help is needed, **HELP** – if assistance is needed).
- If you smell gas at a house, turn it off at the meter.

When you have completed checking each house:

- Report the information to the CC on your radio, or in person if you are close to CC or a Zone Coordinator (if you do not have a radio).
- Confirm that the CC/CT received your report, and expect a response if one is called for, listen to response/instructions and proceed accordingly.
- Request CERT response from the CC (medical/search and rescue) if needed.

*Example of an assessment report: "CC – this is Zone 5 Block 4 with a block assessment report (wait for the CC to acknowledge you and give you the go ahead): Damage to overall block is moderate. No reported or observed injuries. One house—200 Marina Vista Avenue—severely damaged. Have assisted residents/family to exit home safely, one elderly adult will need further assistance as soon as possible—shelter, blankets, possible medical care and is not ambulatory. Road at intersection of Summit and Marina Vista is blocked by a fallen oak tree, will need clearing ASAP. Have cordoned off with yellow tape and am attempting to locate chainsaw and volunteers to remove. Will advise progress. Over.*

- Return to **HELP** flagged houses and provide needed assistance to residents as best you can according to your abilities/skills/training. Perform first aid if you are trained, starting with the most critical injuries first, i.e., triage.

**Important Note:** BCs and ZCs are strongly urged to attend CERT and/or FADR training.  
<https://readymarin.org/cert/>; <https://www.joinmmrc.com>

- Direct and assist CERT team(s) and other **first responders**<sup>3</sup> when/as they arrive at your Block.
- If your Block is safe and secure, report and await further assignment by the CC.
- As time permits and if there is damage to houses in your Block then complete a Property Assessment Form for each damaged house in your Block. Turn completed forms in to the CC or a Zone Coordinator as soon as possible.

### **PHASE 3: Following the Disaster – The Response and Recovery Phase (that includes assessment and follow up)**

- After an emergency/disaster the Block Captain's role is to visit each residence/family, assess their wellbeing, when time permits the status of their home, find out what their immediate needs are, render assistance when possible, and pass impact assessment information on to the CTH NRG CC or first responders.

Once the crisis is over and things have returned to somewhat normal or settled down:

- Ask for and record feedback on how the CTH NRG emergency response can be improved.
- Update forms for the next emergency.
- Re-stock BC supplies / backpack as needed.
- Re-stock medical bags as needed.

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<sup>3</sup> A **first responder** is a person with specialized training who is among the first to arrive to render assistance at the scene of an emergency, such as an accident, natural disaster or terrorist attack. First responders typically include paramedics, ER medical technicians, police officers, firefighters, CERT team members

- Verify accuracy of data base information.
- Forward all relevant collected information to the Zone Coordinator who will compile it and send it to the CTH NRG Steering Committee at [CTHNRG@gmail.com](mailto:CTHNRG@gmail.com)
- Provide feedback on BC readiness, supplies, etc., in preparation for future disasters.
- Attend de-briefing session(s).

## SECTION 2 Family Emergency Response Instructions

A copy of the **Resident Disaster Response information** should be given to each family during a visit from the Block Captain.

**Family Emergency Response:** To facilitate the CTH NRG Emergency Response Plan, all residents, with the assistance of Block Captains, shall if possible display their post-disaster condition by placing an **OK/HELP** sign on their house in a place that is easily visible from the street. BCs will visit homes signed **HELP** first and then move to homes that are unsigned, only then will they visit homes signed **OK**. CERT or FADR members/teams will be dispatched to the places with the most critical medical needs first.

### Instructions to Residents regarding 'HELP', 'OK' and 'CLEAR' Signs

In the aftermath of a disaster – circumstances permitting – place/tape the appropriate sign to your front door or place it in another visible place close to the entrance area (like a window facing the street). If the sign is placed outside, on say a front gate, it should be placed in a zip lock bag so that it is waterproof.

**First responders and CTH NRG Block Captains charged with assessing impact will read the signs as follows:**

**HELP:** Assistance is needed due to injury or other life-threatening or serious circumstance - someone in the house is trapped under debris, gas is leaking and cannot be shut off, an elderly person cannot get up the outside stairs or out of the house, are some examples of when a HELP sign might be used.

**OK:** Assistance is not needed and resident(s)/homeowner(s) are capable of coping on their own at this time.

**CLEAR:** The resident(s)/homeowner(s) has/have evacuated and there is no one in the house in need of assistance at this time.

If residents are safe, but the house is not, residents should be instructed to take their go-kits and go to a neighbor's house or other safe location, or, if they have nowhere to go, report the situation to IC via your radio so that a list of evacuation shelters can be sent to you and shared.

## SECTION 3 Block Captain Assessment

The initial task of a Block Captain is to rapidly assess the situation on the assigned block, gather relevant information (e.g., downed power lines, gas leaks, fires, blocked roads, destroyed houses, etc.), and then to promptly report overall block status and relevant individual status (immediate needs, medical needs, etc.) information to the CTH Command Center (CC). If your block is relatively safe with no heavy impact category injuries then let other BCs with more pressing needs report on the radio first. During a crisis radio traffic control is of the utmost importance. **Medical reports always take precedence.** Always identify yourself, speak clearly, give accurate information, make sure IC is reading you, and ask for and then wait for instructions. **BCs are strongly encouraged to attend radio training – contact [coordinator@nrgmarin.org](mailto:coordinator@nrgmarin.org) for details.**

## Initial Assessment Check List

Remember, initial assessment needs to be done swiftly and as completely as possible. The timeliness of your report may save lives. Have your assessment forms, a pen, clip board, flashlight (if night time) ready at all times. A backpack is ideal so that your hands are free (make sure you have some Stop the Bleed kits in your backpack). Take your radio. Wear your vest and T-shirt. Dress appropriately (warm, heavy duty shoes, etc.)

- Consider who might be home depending on time of day and day of the week
- Consider special needs children and adults – like the elderly, physically or mentally challenged.
- Do you smell gas?
- Do you hear or see water flowing?
- Do you smell smoke or see fire?
- Do you see downed power lines or blocked roads?
- Do you hear calls for help?
- Systematically walk your block using a right-hand or left-hand circuit to avoid missing a house.
- If a house has an **OK** sign showing, note it and move on.
- If a house has a **HELP** sign or no sign – investigate promptly by calling out, knocking, or taking whatever action is appropriate under the circumstances.
- If the house has a **CLEAR** sign, note it and move on.
- If no one is home and no sign is posted, assess the situation without entering the house to the best of your ability.

### **Don't forget to record your assessments for calling in to the Command Center.**

- If you smell gas at any house, turn the gas off at the meter and note it on the form.
- If a person is at the house, quickly obtain the information, fill out the form, flag the house and move on.
- If you come across an injured person, call the information in to the CC immediately (i.e., do not wait until your full assessment is completed), unless injury is very minor and can be treated with first aid or by the resident).

### **Reporting your impact assessment information to the CTH Command Center:**

- Report to the CC and confirm that they received your report.
- Request CERT response if needed.
- Go back to the **HELP** flagged houses and do first-aid if it is safe to enter the house.
- Direct CERT Teams to the locations that they are most needed.
- Go back to **OK** flagged houses and fill out necessary form(s) to find out who is not home and accounted for. Report again to Command Center on who is not accounted for in your block.
- If your block is safe report to the CC for further assignment.

## **SECTION 4 Suggested Equipment/Supplies**

These following Block Captain backpack essentials are suggested for Block Captains to have readily available in the event of an emergency:

- Block captain vest (helmet when supplied)
- Heavy duty gloves
- Latex gloves
- Dust mask(s)
- Water & energy bar(s)
- Clip board, note pad, marker and pen
- Block / hill map showing evacuation routes
  - Resident data base print out - keep in back pack update & update as needed
  - Impact assessment forms
  - Emergency contact numbers & radio call signs (update as needed)
- 2-Way radio & spare batteries
- Cell phone & charger
- Flashlight/headlamp with spare batteries
- Hand crank radio
- Wrench for gas shut-off
- Tape for cordoning off areas
- Duct tape
- Screwdriver & pocket knife or box-cutter
- Warm jacket, closed sturdy shoes
- Small first aid kit & Stop the Bleed kit

## SECTION 5 CTH NRG Communications Plan

CTH NRG has an assigned radio channel—**CHANNEL 29**—and has radio procedures for emergency situations. We are part of the Central Marin NRG communications plan and have assigned radio frequencies for each type of radio so that voice traffic does not conflict between different parts of the NRG and response community. If phones, both land lines and cell, are working, then they should be used for communication between the CTH NRG levels of situation management.

**Block Captains/Zone Coordinators are required to be proficient in radio use and 2-way communications protocol and language. Note: all radio communications are public.**

### How to Give Clear Instructions Via Two Way Radio

**Speak clearly:** The first thing you need to do is make sure you speak clearly. This may seem obvious, but many people do not realize when their voice isn't coming across clearly. Ask your team during/after monthly radio tests whether or not they feel you are speaking clearly through your radio. Be mindful of how you sound over the radio. For example, you may be speaking too quietly, rushing your words or mumbling, which could lead to your instructions getting misinterpreted at a crucial time.

**Review your message before speaking:** Take a moment to think clearly about what you are going to say before you say it. Would you understand your own instructions? Try and find the most concise, straightforward way of explaining things before you throw complex instructions at IC or your team via radio. Simply taking a few seconds to think about what you need to say can really help you to give clear instructions.

**Check to be sure the Command Center Team has understood you:** A simple 'do you copy?' can establish whether or not someone has understood what you have said to them. If they don't sound like they have understood your instructions, it's worth taking the time to explain them again, especially in medical situations. You will get to know your team in time and hopefully they will speak out when they don't understand you. Invite and be open to feedback.

**Avoid information overload:** Try not to overcomplicate your instructions. Rather than delivering everything all at once, break instructions down so that they can be easily digested by IC/your team. Don't go into information overload as it will be too much to take in and nothing will get done. People often try and say too much when they are under pressure or stressed, so when you are in a high-pressure situation, keep your instructions simple and your voice calm and well-

modulated. **Do not overwork the PTT button as it makes a loud sound each time you depress it and wait a second or two before speaking.**

**Don't rush your instructions:** Even if you are under a time pressure, don't be tempted to rush your instructions as it is unlikely to help. Rushing instructions and thereby risking confusion or misinformation won't get things done any faster, in fact, it will probably slow things down.

**Use appropriate radio language:** Use the radio language and phrases that you and your team have agreed on. By using appropriate language, you can keep things short and to the point, and your instructions should be very clear. Appropriate phrases and words will be highlighted in training, so that others do not get confused by your message/instructions.

### **INSERT THE CURRENT CTH NRG CALL SIGN LIST**

**CERT uses CHANNEL 15.** CTH NRG CERT team members will have a call sign issued for identification. All medical/injury radio communication must be kept short and to the point so that all who need to pass on information can get time on the frequency to do so. Medical reports/instructions always take precedence. **NOTE: ONLY THE COMMAND CENTER TEAM COMMUNICATES WITH CERT on Channel 15, individual BCs / ZCs do not.**

If you are a Block Captain, Zone Coordinator or CERT member and do not have a radio, communication between you and the Command Center or Zone Coordinator may need to be done by a volunteer messenger/runner.

### **Command Center(s) (when activated)**

Depending on the emergency and the amount of devastation, the Command Center will be set up first and any secondary command centers needed will be set up thereafter as needed. As soon as the CTH NRG CC is activated. Once the CC Team puts out a radio call to inform Block Captains, Zone Coordinators and CERTs that the CC is activated, they can start communicating.

Block Captain and CERT tactical call signs are needed to quickly identify the parties on the radio. **Names are not used and users must identify themselves only by their call sign before any transmission occurs.** CERT teams will be assigned call signs when they report to CC and are given an assignment.

**Walking through a disaster mentally:** An earthquake is one type of event that could affect the entire area with the possibility of considerable damage. As a Block Captain your help will be vitally needed after such a disaster. The following is a walk-through mental exercise of a disaster so that you have a better idea of how to respond:

- After you feel an earthquake, your first response is to care for those in your home. Turn on your radio right away. After your family members have been evaluated and found to be stable, only then are you ready and able to respond to the other homes on your block. You will want to follow the same procedures and safety tips that you will find in this packet on your own home, just as you would on your neighbors' homes.
- After inspecting your home and learning that all are well in your family, you would then go out and mark your home with an **OK** sign, placed in a visible place. If you or someone in your family is injured mark your home with a **HELP** sign. You then take your backpack/supplies and radio, and walk quickly by the homes on your block to see, for e.g., if any homes have **HELP** signs posted. You proceed in a left or right-hand search pattern depending on which

houses are already marked, so that you can quickly check unmarked houses without missing any. Include marked houses in your search so that you know and can report on the status of all residents/families. Make sure that each home is safe to enter, and then proceed to check on the residents/occupants. As you go through each home, document who is injured and note the status of their injuries, note who isn't at home and where they could be (at work, school, grocery store, etc.), and note any major damage to infrastructure or buildings in your block (broken gas or water line, downed or exposed power lines, damaged roads, etc.). Make detailed written notations regarding injuries, urgent situations and serious hazards.

- Once you have visited each home and determined the status of all residents, send a clear and concise report of the information to the CC via your radio. The CC will gather reports from Block Captains, make response and referral decisions, dispatch assistance as resources/volunteers allow, and pass information to CERT and to local area command centers.
- As you check on homes, you may find residents/occupants that have been seriously injured. You will initially spend a few moments with them to assess their condition, call it in to the CC, render first aid if appropriate and if you are trained, and then if possible have an available neighbor stay with them as you continue to check the other homes. Once each resident at home has been checked, homes have been marked, and reports passed to the CC, you will then return to the injured residents in your block and provide for their needs until a CERT team arrives to take over treatment and transport to a professional care facility or to a designated first-aid field unit. If necessary, one or more ZCs/BCs shall create a first-aid field unit with volunteers and then call for CERT or FADR trained people to provide medical assistance and support.

## **SECTION 7 More specific detail about certain key aspects of a Block Captain's responsibilities**

### **Home Building Inspection**

There are several factors that you must assess before you enter a building that has recently been through a natural disaster. All of the factors listed below point to a potential unsafe environment, meaning that you should not enter the building because of the possibility of partial or total collapse. Many of these factors discussed are easy to see, especially if they are severe, but others are subtle and may require an extra detailed look. The first and foremost responsibility of a Block Captain is to be safe. If you become trapped, wounded or fatally injured, you will not be of value to the other residents that may need your assistance. **Never enter a building alone. Always have a partner so that someone knows where you are if you happen to get trapped or injured.**

**Do not enter a building if** there are obvious signs that can be seen from the exterior of a home or other building that should act as a red flag to any Block Captain. If you see any of the following factors, do not enter the home. Instead, for your safety, utilize another method to determine if anyone is inside.

- **Roof Sagging:** A sagging roof indicates major damage to that portion of the roof. The damage could possibly be accompanied by a damaged support wall or beam. A sagging roof could easily fall on an unsuspecting victim in the event of an aftershock, or during further settling that can occur for some time after an incident.

- **Large cracks in sections of the structure:** Large cracks in concrete structures are a sign of significant damage and such homes should not be entered (figure 1.). However, be aware that it is possible for the frame of a home to shift and bend during seismic activity and not sustain heavy damage. If that occurs, light damage could be seen as a hairline crack and the siding, trim or other surface will return to their normal position. However, if this same home does sustain heavy damage, the exterior cracks will be much larger, sometimes several inches to several feet.
- **Brick or masonry chimney leaning towards the structure:** This poses a potential hazard because the chimney could come crashing down on the home. The chimney could just be a facade, but be cautious of falling bricks.
- **Exterior walls leaning out of plumb:** A building leaning out of plumb could easily collapse with the slightest further movement. Look at the first photo below to get a better idea of how a building may look. Even though it is still standing, the building has suffered major damage to its structure and should not be entered.



The entire wall near the chimney is out of plumb.



Cracks in a masonry are a sign of danger.



Leaning porch after an earthquake



Natural gas shut off valve next to meter

**Natural gas odor:** Natural gas can be detected by its smell. As you go around a home to determine whether or not it is safe to enter, check the gas meter for any leaks. As you approach the meter, try to determine whether or not you can smell gas in the area. If you do, shut off the turn-off valve immediately. Otherwise, check each of the joints of the pipes and the meter, smelling around each one to verify that the integrity of the seal has not been broken. If gas is not detected, leave the meter on; the gas supply should only be turned off if an immediate threat or concern exists. If gas is detected, turn the valve to the off position— perpendicular to the pipe.

If there is a gas leak, consider turning off the main electrical disconnect to the home as well. This may save you and others inside of the home from the threat of an explosion. This disconnect can usually be found near the electrical meter. It may be easier to turn off all of the circuit breakers in electrical panel for the house. This will turn off all electrical power to the home. If a gas leak is detected, do not enter the home until the gas has dissipated. Any spark created by you, another person, or an object has the potential to create a dangerous explosion.

**Broken or loose electrical wires:** Broken or loose electrical wires may be a sign of major damage to the foundation or structural integrity of the home. It may be wise to shut off the power supply to the home. If you see this sign, look closely for the other signs described in this section to be sure that the structure is safe to enter.

**Dangerous trees:** After a seismic event or high winds, trees may become uprooted or become very weak and begin to fall. Be aware of large trees that are close to the home. If they are leaning towards the home or are even situated on the structure, that part of the home may be unsafe to enter.



The weight of these tree could cause parts of the homes to collapse.

**Popping or cracking noise:** A distinct popping or cracking noise is a sign that the frame of the home is in motion. Get away from the home and keep others away because it may collapse or experience considerable settling.

**Broken glass above entry point:** Broken glass above the entry point could easily fall as you try to enter the home. Vibrations from opening the door or bumping a wall, or further settling or even aftershock could cause the glass to fall on you or other personnel. Try to locate another entry point that will provide a safer way to enter the home. You could try to eliminate the threat of the broken glass if that is the only way into the home. Knock the glass down and then be careful as you go in and out of the home.

**Once inside the structure:** Once you have determined that it is safe to enter a home, constantly look for further signs of damage to the home as well as other safety concerns. Remember, you, the rescuer, are the most important person and must always be careful not to become trapped, injured or otherwise unable to render assistance. Also, always be aware of where you are inside of the home and the dangers that exist. Remember, if an earthquake has occurred, aftershocks can follow and have the potential to be as strong as the initial quake. Bookshelves, cabinets, wall hangings, light fixtures, and other objects can fall or be thrown, injuring an unsuspecting victim.

**Be aware of natural gas or other gas smells:** You have already checked the gas meter outside, but be aware of gas smells inside of the home. The meter and pipes outside of the home may not have sustained any damage during the disaster, but the pipes and fittings inside the home may be damaged, loose, or broken, and gas may be leaking inside of the home. If that is the case, exit the home as quickly as possible, and turn of the gas valve as described earlier. After the valve

has been safely shut-off and the main electrical disconnect is turned off, you may re-enter the home once the gas has dissipated.



**Large open cracks:** In a home built of a wooden frame, sheet rock can crack under movement but will go back together leaving only the appearance of a hairline crack in the wall. If the sheetrock does not return to its normal position and you see a large gap between the two pieces of sheetrock, there may be serious structural problems.

**An example of large gaps in sheet rock**

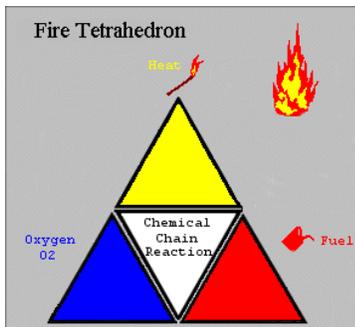
**Sagging beams across openings:** Usually the doorframe is one of the strongest areas of a home due to the header above the door. If any area of the door opening is sagging, DO NOT ENTER that area. That is a very unstable, damaged area of the home and any other major movements that occur could cause that area of the home to collapse. Also look at the ceiling of each room you enter. If any part of the ceiling is sagging, leave the room; any major movements could cause the ceiling to collapse.



**Deformed studs in open bearing walls**

This will be something you will only see in an unfinished basement. Normally studs are straight and not deformed, but after significant movement and damage, the studs may actually begin to bow and deform. If you see deformed studs, the home is not safe and you should evacuate all residents and stay out of the home. **Notice the middle stud in the picture is deformed in an "S" shape.**

## Fire Suppression



A fire requires four things to ignite and then to spread: fuel, heat, oxygen, and a chemical reaction. Without any one of these elements a fire cannot exist and will begin to die or be immediately put out. Fire extinguishers or the agents used in fire suppression remove one or more of these elements. One of the most important things you must remember if you happen upon a fire is that you are not a firefighter. Be very, very careful. Fires can double in size every minute, which means that a small manageable fire could engulf an entire room in a matter of minutes. With a typical fire extinguisher, you can put out a fire that is the size of a 55-gallon drum. Any larger than that and the

fire is quickly becoming too large and the fumes and smoke can quickly overcome an unprotected rescuer.

**Fire Types:** There are four types of fires and five types of fire extinguishers; use extreme caution that you use the right extinguisher for the type of fire. Using the wrong agent could cause more damage by spreading the fire rather than putting the fire out.

Type of Fire	Description of Fire
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<b>Type A</b>	Fires involving wood, paper, cloth, rubber, and many plastics.
<b>Type B</b>	Fires involving flammable liquids and gases including gasoline, solvents, propane, and paints.
<b>Type C</b>	Fires involving energized electrical equipment, including fuse boxes, wiring, control panels, computers, copiers, machines, and appliances. In short, anything plugged into electricity.
<b>Type D</b>	A fire involving metals, including combustible powders, shavings, or flakes of metals such as magnesium, titanium, potassium, and sodium.
<b>Type K</b>	Fires involving cooking oils and fats often used in commercial kitchens.

**Class A** – Class A fires burn ordinary solid materials such as paper, cloth, wood and plastics. Some examples of a Class A fire are a simple trash can fire, camp fire, or even most house fires. Fire extinguishers used to put out this type of fire will have one of three agents: water, foam or dry chemical. The water agent removes the heat from the fire; the foam agent removes both the air and the heat from the fire; and the dry chemical breaks the chemical reaction of fire.

**Class B:** Class B fires burn flammable liquids such as oils, gasoline, kitchen grease, combustible liquids, and paints. The actual liquid does not catch on fire because oxygen cannot penetrate deep enough into the liquid; therefore, the vapors of the liquid are actually burning and not the liquid itself. Class B fires are extinguished by foam, Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) or dry chemical. The foam and CO<sub>2</sub> agents remove the oxygen from the fire, suffocating the flames. The dry chemical breaks the chemical reaction of fire.

**Class C:** Class C fires burn electrical equipment such as wiring, fuse boxes, motors or appliances. A Class C fire is only considered as a Class C while it is energized; removing the electrical source will make the fire safer for you to fight. Class C fires are extinguished by CO<sub>2</sub> or dry chemical. The CO<sub>2</sub> agent removes the oxygen and the dry chemical breaks the chemical reaction of fire.

**Class D:** Class D fires burn combustible metals such as aluminum, magnesium and titanium. Class D fires are extinguished by special agents that usually remove the oxygen. It is unlikely that you would ever encounter a Class D fire, and if you did, do not try to fight it, evacuate the area and notify professional responders. If no one is available, the structure will just burn to the ground; you are not properly trained and qualified to fight a class D fire.

### How to Extinguish Small Fires

Class A fire extinguishers - triangle symbol  
 Class B fire extinguishers - square symbol

Class C fire extinguishers - circle symbol  
 Class D fire extinguishers - star symbol



With the information provided, you should **not** consider yourself able to fight all types of fires listed above. In fact, the only types of fire you should try to extinguish are classes A and B if you have the correct extinguisher. In the right environment, having all the needed elements, a small fire can quickly grow consuming a room and filling large areas with dangerous smoke.

KNOW YOUR FIRE EXTINGUISHER				
CHOOSING THE RIGHT EXTINGUISHER CAN PREVENT PROPERTY DAMAGE AND SAVE LIVES				
Extinguisher Type →	Water	Foam	CO <sub>2</sub>	Dry Chemical
Type of Fire ↓				
<b>A</b> Paper, Wood & Plastic	✓	✓	X	✓
<b>B</b> Flammable & Combustible Liquids	X	✓	✓	✓
<b>C</b> Electrical Equipment	X	X	✓	✓

Before attempting to put out a fire, have a buddy, or back up with another extinguisher go in with you. Test both extinguishers before entering the building. This buddy can be an extra set of eyes as you get closer to the small fire. Plus, the buddy would be able to help you if something were to happen. There are four steps that you should

follow when you attempt to put out a fire. They can easily be remembered by the acronym PASS:

### Pull - Aim – Squeeze - Sweep

**Pull:** The first step is the pull the pin. Most fire extinguishers come with a safety pin in the handle that prevents accidental discharge of the agent. You must first pull this pin before anything else. Let your buddy know that you have pulled the pin and that you are going in, closer to the fire. Your buddy will proceed close and behind you. Stay a safe distance from the fire, no closer than 3 feet.

**Aim:** In order to safely put out the fire, aim the extinguisher at the base of the fire. If you don't, the fire could increase or flare up.

**Squeeze:** After you have aimed at the base of the fire, squeeze the handle on the extinguisher to discharge the agent. Do not be afraid, fire extinguishers do not kick.

**Sweep:** Sweep the extinguisher back and forth across the entire base of the fire until the fire has successfully been put out. When you no longer see any flames, release the handle and wait about 15 seconds. This will allow you to be sure that fire is out. If there are any remnants of the fire, they will have flared up again in that time. If the flames kick up again, follow the same steps as described above until you are sure the fire is out.

### Search and Rescue and Triage (if you are CERT or FADR trained)

We strongly recommend that BCs take FADR training. See FADR guide hand-out.

**Triage:** The term Triage comes from the French word “to sort” and is literally a sorting of the injured. If the extent of damage is great, you may need to quickly assess all residents in your block. The principle of triage is to stabilize someone so that they will live long enough for more help to arrive. You can achieve this goal by stabilizing the injured. As a Block Captain your first responsibility is in your own home and family’s safety. After checking on your family and home, proceed to identify the injured. Only after you have checked all victims, can you accurately commit resources according to priorities. As needed call the Command Center for search and rescue and medical assistance/support from CERT; as needed, assist in setting up a medical field unit.

**Rapid Assessment:** The goal of the rapid assessment is to spend 1-2 minutes (initially) with each victim to assess and stabilize the “Killer ABC’s”: **Airway, Bleeding and Circulation**. Start the assessment at the head and proceed down the body to the feet; follow a consistent pattern will ensure that you completely check each victim. (See FADR guidelines provided.)

**Airway:** As you approach each victim, announce your presence and what you are doing, ask if you may assist them. If you get a response, they are breathing and you don't need to check their airway any further. If you do not get a response, tilt head back to open airway and place your ear close to the victim's mouth. With your ear by their mouth, listen for breathing, look at their chest to see if it rises and falls, and feel for abdominal movement with your hands. If the victim is not breathing, use a neighbor to begin CPR and breathing assistance. As difficult as it may be for you to leave that person, you must continue checking the other homes to be sure to that there aren't others in a similar situation. After you have checked all other homes, you can dedicate your time those that are seriously injured.

**Bleeding:** As you inspect a victim, you will most likely notice any major bleeding. To be sure, you can check the arms, chest, ribs, stomach, pelvis, legs, and feet by swiping your hands across the body part. If you find any major bleeding, wrap it with a bandage, apply direct pressure and/or elevate the wound. If you have gloves wear them!

**Circulation:** After the body has suffered significant trauma, a natural response is to conserve all blood for vital organs – this causes shock. Consequently, you need to check each victim for symptoms of shock. As you check for shock, look for three symptoms:

- (1) rapid, shallow breathing;
- (2) cold, pale skin (capillary refill time greater than 2 seconds); and
- (3) failure to respond to simple commands.

Treating a victim for shock is a simple yet life-saving tactic. Follow the steps listed below:

- Lay the victim on their back and elevate the feet 6-10 inches.
- Maintain their body temperature by covering them with a blanket or coat (if possible, be sure that the ground they are on is a desirable temperature as well).
- Avoid rough or excessive handling.

By following these simple steps, you can save the life of someone who might otherwise have died of shock.

## Flagging Homes

A Block Captain must ensure that each home has, before a disaster, an **OK/HELP** sign. **OK** signs signal that all the residents in the home are well. **HELP** signs signal that someone in the home has sustained minor or major injuries and requires help immediately. Stressing the use of the signs by residents is vitally important.

Immediately following a disaster, residents should be instructed by their Block Captain to assess each person in the home as well as the structure itself. After they complete this assessment, they should sign their home according to their needs. Residents should place the sign in plain sight for anyone that may pass by in response (i.e., Block Captains, CERT Teams, professional responders, or neighbors). Block Captains should follow the same process on their own home before going to any other home.

Block Captains should then proceed from their home to check on the neighbors in the block. Do this systematically (left-hand or right-hand search) or you will miss a house. Remember that life is more important than property; if you go to a home and no one is there, do not continue assessing the home until all other homes have been checked and all victims have been triaged and reported.

As a Block Captain, you need to check all homes before you commit your time to any one victim or situation. This may be difficult to do because you may want to stay with someone to provide comfort and care. You must remember that you have a responsibility to everyone in the block. You can, however, recruit neighbors to stay with someone that is injured or to secure a home from anyone trying to go inside because of extensive damage.

## Documenting and Reporting

This is the final step in the initial disaster response. Although it is the last step, it is one of the most important. As a neighborhood, we CTH NRG and first responders will rely on your reports to help determine response priorities and needs from other State and Federal agencies. Reports should be communicated up the chain of command as quickly, concisely and accurately as possible.

**Documenting:** Documentation is a critical element of disaster response that can easily be forgotten or skipped because it is seen as a nuisance or when pressed for time. To the contrary, documentation saves us from duplicating efforts, helps you to remember important facts and ensure continued accuracy as reports are passed from person-to-person. Use the various forms in the appendix of CTH NRG Emergency Response Plan or as distributed from time-to-time as aids in disaster preparation and response.

Key forms include:

- **Resident Information Form.** Use this form to record information on each household.
- **Block Captains Initial Assessment and Reporting Form.** Use this form during the disaster to record information about the impact on each family, who is injured and who is not at the house, etc. Reports to the Command Center will be made off this form.
- **Medical Form.** Use this form as needed to start documentation on each person who needs medical treatment.
- **Property Assessment Form.** Use this form to document the condition of each house in your block. The information will inform the Command Center and relief / response teams about the needs of each resident/family.

**Reporting:** Once you have gathered critical information from your neighbors, you will then pass it on to the Command Center during the emergency and to the Zone Coordinator following an emergency. Once again, critical information includes: victims and injuries, missing persons and possible locations, and major structural damage. The CC will compile needed assistance reports from all the Block Captains in the neighborhood and will then make a complete report and give it to CERT and local Area Command through the appropriate chain of command. Each Area Command will then take all the needs reports and give them to the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the EOCs of Corte Madera and Larkspur Towns. Area Command will have telephone and radio communication with the EOC.

## Important Resources

Block Captains and Zone Coordinators have an obligation to educate themselves about disaster preparedness and response, to locate, access and share resources, to avail themselves of training opportunities (like CERT, FADR, IC, and radio training) and to take all necessary and important steps to faithfully and responsibly carry out their vitally important responsibilities. **The CTH NRG website contains all the forms referenced, BC training materials, Block Captain/Zone Coordinator/Steering Committee listings, radio instructions and call signs,**

the monthly Central Marin NRG newsletter, the most recent CTH NRG map, and a wealth of other information. **PLEASE USE THIS VALUABLE RESOURCE.** <https://www.cthnrq.org>

## RESOURCE LINKS

[www.ReadyMarin.org](http://www.ReadyMarin.org)

[Www.NRGMarin.org](http://Www.NRGMarin.org)

<https://local.nixle.com/city/ca/>

<https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>

<https://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>

<https://www.marinsheriff.org/services/emergency-services/alert-marin>

<http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/be-red-cross-ready/get-a-kit>

<http://www.nsc.org/learn/safety-knowledge/Pages/safety-at-home-emergency-preparedness>

[https://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/areyouready\\_full.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/areyouready_full.pdf)

<https://www.ready.gov/floods>

<https://www.ready.gov/earthquakes>

<https://www.ready.gov/animals>

## Defensible Space



Defensible Space is your home's first line of defense against an approaching wildfire. 100' of Defensible Space is required by law to help slow or stop the spread of wildfire, protecting your home from direct flame contact and radiant heat while catching or redirecting wind-blown embers. For assistance in creating and maintaining proper defensible space or to have a free home assessment, please contact the Central Marin Fire Department at 415-927-5077 or email: [defensiblespace@centralmarinfire.org](mailto:defensiblespace@centralmarinfire.org)

## Red Flag Warnings <sup>4</sup>

[http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications\\_firesafety\\_redflagwarning](http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications_firesafety_redflagwarning)

## In Conclusion

CTH is a high-risk area for both wildfires and earthquakes. The use of NRGs and Block Captains to assist in preparation, response and recovery, is relatively new, as is the coordination of NRG Block Captains, CERT teams, Command Centers, and Area Commands at the local level. There is a growing recognition of the value of having many volunteers all over the community who will look out for their neighbors and inform first responders and town leaders of their needs. Professional responders will not be able to respond everywhere immediately following a disaster; in fact, local resources will most likely be overwhelmed if the event should occur County or area-wide. Know that all the residents of CTH will be greatly served by your efforts and that lives may be spared through your service as Block Captains and Zone Coordinators.

**Thank you for volunteering and for your service to the CTH community, if we can assist you in any way to fulfill your responsibilities, please do not hesitate to contact us at [cthnrq@gmail.com](mailto:cthnrq@gmail.com). With appreciation, the CTH NRG Steering Committee.**

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<sup>4</sup> The National Weather Service routinely issues Red Flag Warnings & Fire Weather Watches to alert fire departments of the onset, or possible onset, of critical weather and dry conditions that could lead to rapid or dramatic increases in wildfire activity. A Red Flag Warning is issued for weather events which may result in extreme fire behavior that will occur within 24 hours. A Fire Weather Watch is issued when weather conditions could exist in the next 12-72 hours. A Red Flag Warning is the highest alert. During these times extreme caution is urged by all residents, because a simple spark can cause a major wildfire. A Fire Weather Watch is one level below a warning, but fire danger is still high.