

UC Monthly Safety Spotlight, Dec. 2011 – Jan. 2012

Home Emergency Preparedness

Careless Chris Plans Poorly...an Imaginary Scenario

Fictitious employee Careless Chris had just watched a documentary on disaster preparedness. She was impressed by the dramatic stories of families facing hardships after earthquakes, floods and other disasters, and was determined that her family would be well supplied if the worst should happen. Chris told her husband she would take the lead on setting up a family disaster kit. She was impatient about researching the best way to prepare a kit, however, so instead, she went directly to the shopping center. She headed to the big box store and filled her cart with dried fruit, canned foods and juices, pasta, rice, cereal and energy bars. "This should be enough for us and the kids," she thought as she piled boxes and bottles onto her cart. She also bought flashlights and batteries, wet wipes, paper products, extra blankets and plastic garbage bags.

She stocked up with two cases of bottled water, over-the-counter medicines and a prepackaged first aid kit. "Who needs instructions, anyway?" she thought with satisfaction as she unloaded the supplies at home; "This is just a matter of common sense." She packed the food and medical supplies in boxes and bags, and lined them up on her garage shelves.

Soon enough, the ongoing responsibilities of work, school and other activities distracted Chris from thinking any more about her disaster kit. She was comfortable knowing the supplies were there in case they were needed.

Two years went by with nothing more alarming than a mild earthquake and some very dry summer weather. The third winter was a different story, however. Heavy rains fell day after day on the hillsides behind her neighborhood. Reports of mudslides, downed trees and power lines and creek flooding began to appear on the evening news. "Good thing I set up that disaster kit," Chris told her husband. "We have nothing to worry about."

Not long after that conversation, a pre-dawn debris flow completely blocked the road into their neighborhood. Electricity, water lines and TV/internet cable were out of commission and the road was impassable. Fortunately, no one was injured and cell phone service was not interrupted.

When dawn broke, Chris and her family learned that it would be about a week before utility and road crews could make their repairs. The family took an inventory of their kitchen supplies, and then ventured out into the rain to check their emergency kit. There was good news and bad news. The flashlights and batteries were still good, as were the paper products, garbage bags and some other supplies. Unfortunately, the unprotected blankets had attracted a family of mice over the past three years. More problems soon surfaced. For example, though Chris had purchased plenty of canned foods, she didn't have a manual can opener. And she had purchased foods that would need a great deal of water – and a heat source – to prepare.

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Careless Chris Plans Poorly...an Imaginary Scenario (continued)

Chris was further dismayed to find that some of the stored foods had become stale, spoiled or dried out. At least half of the food in her kit was unusable. She had also forgotten to buy food and medicine for their three dogs, and worst of all, she soon learned that she had seriously underestimated the family's need for water. There was just enough drinking water for a week, but not the amount they would have liked for personal hygiene.

While they were cut off from the main road, better-prepared neighbors helped the family get through without serious harm. One neighbor loaned them a portable radio so they could keep track of news and emergency instructions. Another let them charge their cell phone batteries using her back-up generator. Chris and her husband were relieved that they had enough food and water to last through the week.

While she and her family waited for road and utility repairs, Chris had time to reflect on some of her missteps. She knew they had been lucky that an evacuation order wasn't issued, since they had not prepared a "go-bag" for each family member or planned for the welfare of their dogs. She resolved that as soon as this crisis was over, she would re-do her family disaster kit. This time, she planned to get advice from her UC Emergency/ Mission Continuity office and county emergency response agencies, and consult websites such as ready.gov, redcross.org, 72hours.org and www.bt.cdc.gov/planning/ before going shopping.

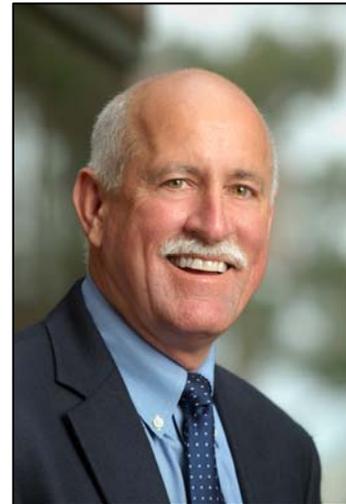
She realized she would need to package everything in airtight plastic bins, replace food and water every six months to keep them fresh, and include utensils, tools, tarps and other hardware items in her kit. She would choose a cool, dark, protected storage place rather than her open garage shelves. Chris also learned how much water a family should store: one gallon per person per day for drinking and hygiene. Most importantly, Chris now realized that preparing for a 72-hour period was the minimum. In future, she would store enough materials for her family to be on their own for a week. The road closure and utility outage was a wake-up call, and Chris was now fully alert about the need for thorough disaster preparedness.

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Fire Safety

Get to Know Your UC Fire Marshal: Your Ally in Fire Prevention

Your campus- or medical center-based UC Fire Marshal orchestrates a network of resources and requirements to protect your facility from the devastating effects of fire. As distinct from firefighters who respond to emergencies, Fire Marshals focus primarily on fire prevention, education and regulatory compliance. UC Fire Marshals are your professionally trained, expert fire prevention consultants,” says Garry Mac Pherson, EH&S Director, UC San Diego and liaison to the UC Fire Marshals’ Work Group. “They understand every detail of fire codes and how they apply to our operations.”



Garry Mac Pherson, Liaison to the UC Fire Marshals’ Work Group

Fire Marshals and their staffs monitor fire prevention infrastructure such as alarms, sprinklers and suppression systems, and enforce regular maintenance of these essential resources. They enforce proper measures for evacuation exits, exit lighting and building occupant load to be sure people are not putting themselves at risk. They conduct inspections and assist department staff in tailoring fire prevention plans and response procedures. This includes challenging environments such as research facilities and vivaria as well as laboratories, with their specific requirements for chemical and gas storage and air exchange systems. Helping campus departments conduct evacuation and emergency response drills is another function of the Fire Marshal’s office.

“You may not see the fire prevention staff when you attend a large campus celebration, graduation, sports event or performance, but you can be assured they are present in the background providing for fire safety.” Garry Mac Pherson

“Each campus addresses fire prevention training and prevention procedures based on their particular needs, says Mac Pherson. “But Fire Marshals from all UC facilities also work together on centralized projects. We have monthly conference calls and we meet annually to address particular challenges and explore ways to share program ideas, expertise and technical innovations. We’re following the “Power of Ten” philosophy to efficiently share our resources.”

As advanced technologies and methods for fire prevention are introduced, Fire Marshals determine what measures should be applied to improve efficiency and still meet fire code requirements. They serve as liaisons across campus operational units such as facilities management, architectural review, emergency/continuity management to ensure a comprehensive approach to meeting safety goals. For example, the Fire Marshal plays a key role in coordinating emergency response exercises in conjunction with campus-based as well as city- or county-based first responders. They also work with the California State Fire Marshal to ensure that all elements of fire codes are implemented on UC campuses.

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Get to Know Your UC Fire Marshal: Your Ally in Fire Prevention (continued)

Another example is the Fire Marshal's vital role in planning new construction or remodeling. In a process that often begins years before breaking ground on a new project, the Fire Marshall meets with building design and construction experts to ensure that adequate fire suppression measures are engineered into the new facility. When a fire does occur, the Fire Marshall assists the fire department in conducting a post-event investigation.

Fire Marshalls are committed and passionate for all the right reasons—the safety of everyone on campus. They tirelessly promote what they know makes a difference. And if the campus has done a good job on the prevention side, the chance of harmful exposure is minimized. Our goal is to see everyone go home safety at the end of the day.”

A well-informed, well-trained campus community is a priceless asset in effective fire prevention. Empowering people with information and training is one of the most important responsibilities of the Fire Marshall's office, whether they directly provide training or arrange for outside resources. On some campuses, fire prevention staff also provide fire prevention and emergency preparedness data to be included with law enforcement information in the campus CLERY report.