

Volcano Community Response Team

October 5, 2019 minutes

Team Leader Nancy Lakin convened the meeting at 9:15 a.m. at Cooper Center. Also present: team members Teresa Evangelista, Hank Schultz, Leigh Critchlow, Ellen O'Dunn, Sher Glass and Jimmy Love; guests Paul Lakin, Zetta Crosson (Ellen's granddaughter and future CERT), and Jimmy's certified Search and Rescue assistants, Happy and Marley. Excused: Duane and Bea Nakanishi, who are assisting at the four-weekend Basic CERT Training in Keaau; Patti Pinto, Claudia Ziroli and Debra Chaffin, who are working; and Doug Wilson and Richard Turner, who are helping with the statewide amateur radio simulated emergency exercise today.

Nancy thanked everyone who turned out for the meeting. She reported that team member Carole Slattery will be coming home tonight after a lengthy medical-related absence on the mainland.

Nancy noted that she has only two more months remaining on her years-long term as Team Leader. "It's been a good long run and I'm so tired," she said, dancing a little jig. "It's been very enlightening."

She reminisced about her 15 years as a Girl Scout troop leader while raising her kids on Oahu. There were lots of outdoor activities, including camping and other badge-worthy exercises. And when her troop was dining al fresco, there were no hotdogs, Nancy stressed. Those kids ate "gourmet" meals such as bacon and eggs in a paper bag and cornish game hens on a stick, etcetera.

Nancy took her volunteer leadership duties seriously, then and now, and said with CERT, "it's even been more: It's helping the whole community where you live."

"It's been a good ride," she finished, getting a rousing round of applause, and a chorus of "we'll miss you, Nancy."

"Y'all can come visit," she responded. (She and hubby Paul will be re-settling in Texas next year to be close to kids and grandkids.)

The main item on the meeting agenda was discussion of the Sept. 21 mock disaster exercise staged by the Volcano Emergency Response Team from headquarters at Carlson Court.

All agreed that in terms of total manpower, the turnout was disappointing, leading to much multi-tasking and re-assignment of personnel. On the CERT level, turnout was sparse, and this was compounded by the loss of several key CERTs, who performed major jobs for VERT, therefore making them unavailable for what previously would have been their CERT roles.

But, organized chaos is the nature of the game in disaster response at a community volunteer level. You never know until it happens who will be able to assist.

Ellen, who served as the VERT planning chief, said of the exercise: "It did exceed my expectations." However, there were glitches. But that's why we have exercises: To learn what works, what doesn't work, and how to fix it, she noted.

Sher, who was assigned to the VERT communications station, said except for a paperwork backlog, "it all went really well."

Common problems noted by various participants included unwieldy paperwork in the form of forms to fill out, communications issues, conflicting instructions from multiple bosses, limited

number of drivers and vehicles and extremely scanty contingent of CERTs for search and rescue teams. Four SAR volunteers need to be sent out per response, in case team members need to lift and transport a victim on a backboard. We wound up with only one team, but multiple missions.

"We need to up our CERT game," to be prepared to help out in an emergency, stated Ellen. She pointed out that the lake in Halemaumau Crater is growing fast, and an explosive incident could happen. "We need to get really serious."

Paul, who headed logistics for VERT, also noted a bit of chaos in the beginning, getting everybody set. And, there were paperwork, communications and manpower concerns.

He said VERT leaders received a lot of good input and suggestions for the future. He's looking forward to the VERT shipping container arriving soon. It will be installed at Cooper Center to hold emergency supplies and equipment.

Nancy, who was VERT operations chief, said functioning was "very difficult, because we did not have enough CERT people." She had to reassign and double up CERT assignments and even then, didn't have enough CERTs for the necessary tasks.

"So, be prepared to wear other hats," she said.

Teresa, the medical chief, agreed that more people were needed, but stressed that she appreciated the help she had. She noted that SAR team members didn't triage patients, a vital function that needs to be done in the field.

Hank, the SAR unit lead, also noted manpower shortages, many miscues on instructions and communications, countermanded assignments and other snafus that hindered the progress of the motivated SAR team, whose best intentions were severely hampered by the overall confusion.

On the equipment front, for CERT moving forward: Jimmy pointed out the importance of having some true gas masks for key personnel at the Incident Command Post, in case of air quality and/or gas-related emergency; Leigh wondered -- since the CERT radio and antenna are now assigned to VERT -- if CERT needs to get another setup for our container.

Nancy reiterated that it is vital that team members opting out of the Volcano CERT ranks return the PPE (personal protection equipment) backpacks and their contents. The items belong to the Civil Defense Agency under the federal FEMA program, which created and oversees CERT nationwide. Funding for CERT has greatly declined, and it's mandatory that the unused PPEs be returned so they can be inventoried and re-issued to incoming team members, she explained.

"Due to budgetary constraints," Nancy said, "FEMA no longer is able to fund its nationwide CERT program in the previous manner." CERT was launched to promote community self-sufficiency following disasters early this century.

Nancy has repeatedly requested return of the PPEs over the last few months. She now will be sending a note to those who haven't complied. She will be including a final request for their return or payment of \$100, which will cover most of the cost of replacement. Please send check for \$100, made payable to the Volcano Community Association (noting that it is for CERT materials) to the VCA at P.O. Box 600, Volcano HI 96785.

Respectfully submitted,
Leigh Critchlow, secretary