

Southern Marin NRG

# SEMI-ANNUAL DRILL GUIDEBOOK

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Neighbors Helping Neighbors



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# What is the drill?



Twice each year on the day of the daylight savings time change (once in the Spring and once in the Autumn), Neighborhood Response Groups across Marin County take part in a semi-annual OK/HELP drill. This exercise helps communities practice how their neighborhood would react after a disaster.

During this simple drill, residents post a "**HELP**" or "**OK**" sign in their home in a location visible from the street or public space.



Neighborhood Response Group Block Captains walk their street or floor of their apartment building, keeping track of which households displayed their signs.

Some communities conduct sophisticated exercises, complete with simulated injuries, and practice two-way radio communication, while others use the opportunity to gather with their fellow Block Captains, walk their street, and engage with neighbors. If you've already collected your neighbors' contact info with the [Resident Information Form](#), send out a reminder to participate in the next drill.



If you don't have an OK/HELP sign already, you can download and print one [here](#). Please reach out to [nrg@smfd.org](mailto:nrg@smfd.org), if you need more assistance or have photos to share from your drill.

For the Block Captains out there wondering how to participate this year, continue reading for ideas on how your Neighborhood Response Group can get involved. If you're still looking for a co-captain or haven't quite started, you can still print the sign and practice. Building muscle memory now can help if you respond to a real life disaster in the future.

# How can you get involved?

## Just getting started

Maybe you just started your Neighborhood Response Group this year or you're regrouping after a break, this drill is a great opportunity to set aside time to connect with your fellow Block Captains and neighbors.

- Reach out to the Block Captains in your neighborhood and decide on a place to meet on your street at 10am on the day of the daylight savings time change. If this day and time doesn't work for you, find one that does.
- Gather & share updates with each other, then walk the block to hand out OK/HELP signs or other emergency prep resources to your neighbors.
- Haven't had a chance to collect your neighbors' contact info? Introduce yourself and ask neighbors to fill out the [Resident Info Form](#).



Download signs here!

## Organized, but looking for next steps

Let's say your neighborhood is well organized, maybe you even practiced the drill at the last time change, but you're not ready to make it complicated. That's ok!

- Remind your neighbors the drill will be happening. (Remember that email roster you created?)
- Walk the street, write down which addresses participated, and hand out new resources.
- Make a note of things that have changed in your neighborhood: property access, new neighbors, etc.
- Take out your two-way radios and practice the basics as a group. Start with simple functions on the radio: on/off, talking clearly on the radio, and taking turns.



## Ready for a challenge

You know your block like the back of your hand. Your neighbors have their signs, Block Captains bought two-way radios, and you're ready for a challenge. Below are a few ideas you can practice with your fellow Block Captains and neighbors.

- Practice proper radio protocol with your co-captain or a helpful neighbor. Remember, you might use this in a real emergency.
- Make note of or map areas with poor reception to watch out for in emergencies. Don't be afraid to move to an area with better reception, even a couple feet.
- Create an emergency scenario and respond by radio. *"This is a **DRILL**. We have a partially collapsed carport at [address]. There was a gas leak, and we've turned off the gas valve. The family is fine. This is a **DRILL**."*

**How would you respond?**



# Radio Basics

Below are tips and basic guidelines for using two-way radios. Take a moment to collect your thoughts and calm yourself before sending a message. Waiting a moment to send a clear message is better than sending a poorly formed message quickly.

## Get ready to send your message

- Face toward the direction of the person you're calling. Your body, buildings, and terrain can block the signal.
- Hold radio vertical and talk across, not into the mic.
- Use clear, plain language and a normal tone. Shouting into the mic distorts the signal.
- Walkie-talkies are not like a phone. You cannot hear others when you are sending, and vice versa.





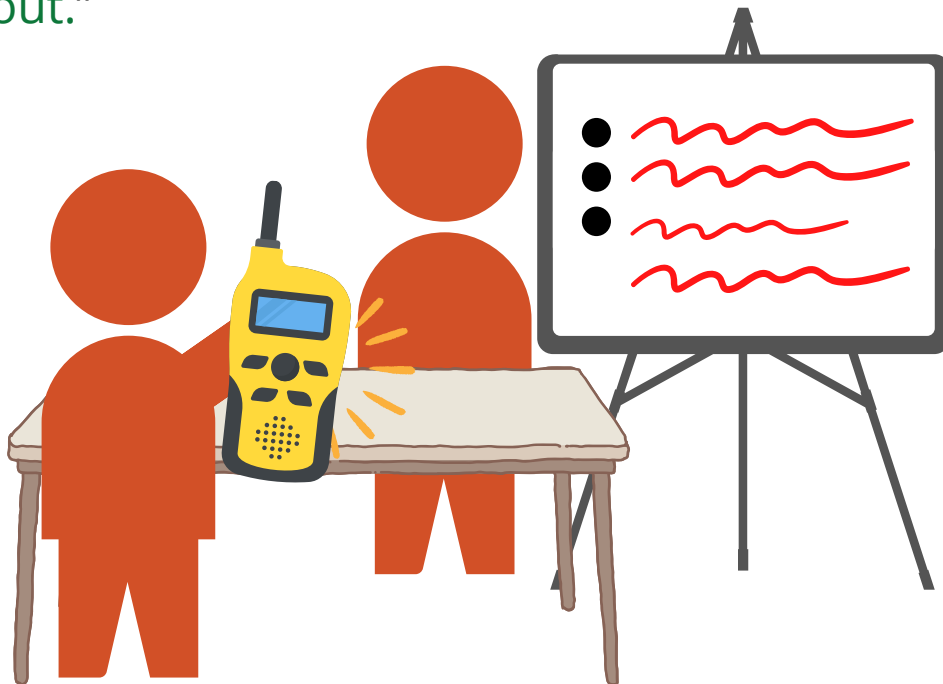
# Sending a message

Form a clear, short message in your mind **before** hitting any buttons.

- Push transmit button, count **one second** and then begin talking.
- State the name or unit you are trying to reach, your team name, then "Over".
- Count **one second** and release the transmit button.
- Keep calm, wait to be recognized.
- Only after you are recognized should you send your message.
- This initial back and forth should sound something like this:
  - "Command Post, this is Cascade 9, over."
  - "Cascade 9, this is Command, go ahead, over."
  - **Now** you can send your message.  
Ex: "A resident at 1 Main Street has a broken arm. Can you send someone to perform first aid? Over."

# Ending Transmission

- Say name of person/unit you are communicating with.
- Confirm you understand information transmitted.
- Give your team ID.
- Say "Clear" or "Out" (these terms are interchangeable and used to **end** the conversation).
- Example:
  - Command speaking to you: "Cascade 9, we're sending first aid to 1 Main Street. Stay with resident until they arrive, over."
  - "Command, message is understood. Cascade 9, out."



# Tips & Troubleshooting

- If your Neighborhood Command Post is not responding, wait and listen for any other radio traffic. They may be dealing with multiple calls.
- Make sure you are on agreed-upon channel.
- Check for low or dead batteries and make sure volume is turned up.
- If reception or transmission is scratchy or garbled, try moving your location, even just a few feet.
- **Do not** turn off the radio or turn the volume down while out in the field. If it's distracting while dealing with a situation, hand the radio to another team member to monitor. If it's essential to be off-radio, inform Command before switching off and when you switch back on. Otherwise, they'll think you need help.
- If you have an **emergency** that is clearly more important than the call in progress, you may interrupt with the words "break-break" or "emergency". The Command Post will reply "Breaker, go ahead" and you can deliver your message.

# Why do we use radios?

The last few pages may seem like a lot to take in, and that's ok. It takes practice to get used to new tools.

One of the main benefits of two-way radios in Neighborhood Response Groups is internal communication. Even if your group is not set up, yet, with a Command Post, you can more quickly communicate with your fellow Block Captains and relay important information.

Once you have a Neighborhood Command Post set up, it will be a centralized point Block Captains around the area can radio important incident details to in a real disaster.

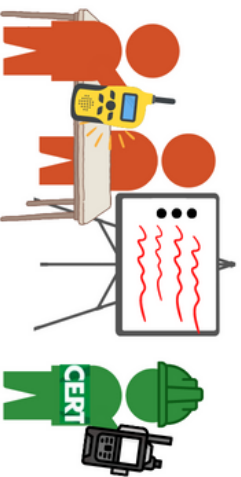
**Always** try 9-1-1 in a **real** emergency. If 9-1-1 is down in a disaster, your Command post can collect important incident details in one centralized place. This will save First Responders time if and when they can respond.

The [flow chart](#) on the next page shows multiple ways Block Captains can communicate in disasters, both with and without radios. CERT volunteers, if available locally, can also take part in forwarding messages.

# Neighborhood Communications in Disasters



**Block Captains** gather incident info from their block & deliver updates to Neighborhood Command Post

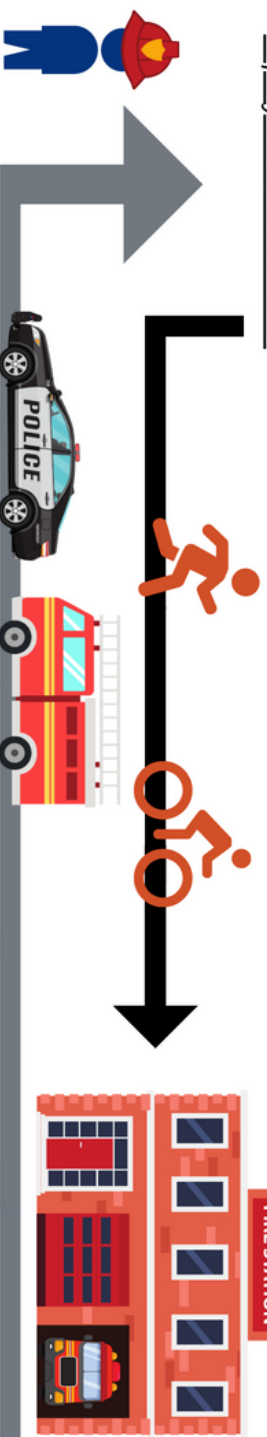


**Block Captains** gather incident info from their block & **radio** updates to Neighborhood Command Post

## Neighborhood Command Post

**Block Captains** record incidents. They can wait for first responders or attempt to deliver critical info to nearest station, if safe to do so. First responders may be deployed & unavailable.

**CERT**, if on scene, can radio incidents to volunteer staffed Net Control to communicate directly to Emergency Operation Center (EOC).



**When able**, first responders verify incident on scene & communicate to Emergency Operations Center



# Not quite ready?

The important thing to remember is to take it in stages. This might be the first time you've heard about Neighborhood Response Groups. To find out if a group already exists in your area or more about how to start a group, you can reach out to the Southern Marin NRG Coordinator, Leah Curtis, at [nrg@smfd.org](mailto:nrg@smfd.org).

Once you're connected, you'll receive regular communication about events and training opportunities, like hands-only CPR, webinars, and more.

Scan this QR code with the camera on your smartphone to save the NRG Coordinator's contact info to your phone.

Thank you for taking a step to better prepare for emergencies and disasters in our community.

**Stay in touch!**

