



CHCHD News

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Health Department Conducts Door-to-Door CASPER Survey, Encourages Emergency Preparedness

Chattanooga, TN – The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department conducted door-to-door surveys over two days in September as part of National Preparedness Month. The survey offered public health officials a chance to practice a survey methodology known as Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER).

Utilizing a tested sampling methodology that allows results to be generalized to the selected geographic area, approximately 200 households in the 5-mile radius around the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) Sequoyah Nuclear Power Plant were randomly surveyed. The survey helps public health officials gather information on resident readiness to respond to an emergency event at the facility. Health Department staff and volunteers from the Health Department's Medical Reserve Corps administered the 23-question survey, which asked about knowledge of emergency information, residents' plans in the event of a radiological emergency, and whether residents would need special help in case of an evacuation.

Each year, TVA sends calendars with detailed emergency response and evacuation information to all households within a 10-mile radius of each of its nuclear facilities. Of the 151 households who reported receiving the TVA Sequoyah calendar,

- 67 percent said they reviewed the information in the calendar,
- 32 percent said they did not review the information in the calendar, and
- 1 percent, responded "don't know"

"We were pleased to learn that many residents who live near Sequoyah take time to review the important information in the calendars provided by TVA," said Sarah Stuart Sloan, epidemiologist at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "However, there is still an opportunity for both the Health Department and TVA to encourage every household to regularly review this information and take steps to develop a plan for their family, no matter what the emergency," she added.

The 2012 version of the TVA calendar will be mailed in the coming weeks and efforts have been increased to ensure this important emergency response information is reviewed. Postcards will be mailed to affected households to alert them that the new calendar will soon arrive, and the calendars themselves have been augmented with attention-getting stickers to provide reminders to keep the material handy to review throughout the year.

In the event of a nuclear emergency being declared at the Sequoyah Nuclear Power Plant, Hamilton County Emergency Management and the Health Department have a well-developed and regularly tested emergency response plan in place to mitigate the emergency and assist area residents living in the two, five and 10-mile Emergency Planning Zones surrounding the plant.

(more)

An important part of preparedness and response for the Sequoyah Nuclear Power Plant is the system of sirens located throughout the 10-mile emergency planning zone, which is controlled by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) and tested every first Wednesday of the month.

In a real event, if sirens are sounded, it is a signal that residents should tune in to their local news for instructions. The survey revealed that while 32 percent of residents would listen to the local news if they heard the siren, 36 percent said they would evacuate.

"It is important that residents who live near the Sequoyah facility know that they should not evacuate immediately upon hearing the sirens, which may be activated by TEMA for several different reasons," said Sabrina Novak, radiological response coordinator at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "Residents should listen for instructions because while evacuation is a possibility, they may be instructed to shelter-in-place," Novak said.

The April tornados that hit the Tennessee Valley are an example of how disaster can strike at any time. The severe weather event emphasized the need for people to plan for emergencies. "It's something we might not want to think about, but being prepared for an emergency is everyone's responsibility," said Dawn Ford, emergency response coordinator at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "Being prepared is not just about having food, water, and flashlights. Think about your children's needs, pets, medications, and develop a plan that will help you and your family get through the first hours or even days of an emergency until help arrives," Ford said.

Every individual and family should consider the following:

- Would you utilize a shelter?
- Do you have a communication plan or meeting place for loved ones?
- Does anyone in the household require special help, medical equipment, medication, etc.
- Do you have a plan for your pet(s)?

"The website www.ready.gov can help people determine how to address many of these concerns in the event of an emergency. We look forward to working closely with TVA to promote the message of emergency preparedness, not just for those living near Sequoyah but for everyone in the Tennessee Valley," said Ford.

About CASPER

CASPER is a community-based survey that provides for the rapid collection of reliable and representative information on public health issues and human services needs following disasters. CASPER can also be used during more routine public health functions such as community needs assessments as is the case for this exercise.

The CDC, as well as other international, state and local partners utilized the CASPER methodology since the early 1990s, in such disasters as hurricanes Ike and Katrina, and the recent Gulf Coast oil spill. CASPER uses a flexible, scalable, trained team to collect and analyze information and depending on the situation, report to Emergency Management, Public Health, and other decision-makers within 72 hours of beginning the CASPER process. Emergency relief efforts can then be directed specifically to the needs identified in the survey.

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