

National Emergency Technology Guard Pilot Program Summary

Cottonwood Heights, Utah

NET Guard Program Description

NET Guard is a program that develops teams of volunteers with verified relevant expertise to support IT and communications systems and services. NET Guard programs are tested as local assets and deployed through pre-disaster agreement with local Emergency Management for public and nonprofit entities providing essential services. Teams are established and maintained by governmental or private sector sponsors or both. Service examples include: mobile capability for shelters, volunteer reception center sites, evacuation staging areas, public internet access for recovery; local support for using new technologies for disaster preparedness, response, recovery including social media for public communication and situational awareness and crisis mapping; liaison with virtual volunteers for new technology tools and resources for response and recovery; temporary systems and communication back up for EOC or critical government functions. The NET Guard Team is designed as a local asset following the Citizen Corps partner program model and as a means to surge additional resources into impacted areas through mutual aid.

The City of Cottonwood Heights, Utah

The City of Cottonwood Heights is located in Salt Lake County, Utah, along the east bench of the Salt Lake Valley. Following a successful incorporation referendum in May 2004, the City was inaugurated on January 14th, 2005 as the 16th incorporated city in Salt Lake County. As of the 2000 Census, there were 27569 people, 9439 households, and 7249 families residing in the Census-designated place (CDP) of Cottonwood Heights. Portions of the Wasatch Fault -an active earthquake fault line- run through the eastern portion of the city.

Cottonwood Heights NET Guard: A Snapshot

Purpose: The Cottonwood Heights NET Guard team concept involved a team of NET Guard volunteers that would go to the scene of the Emergency Management Operations and establish a communication hub with the first responders and other involved agencies and groups during an emergency or disaster. The main purpose is to serve as the primary source to connect all responding groups and provide workable radio and IT connections during an incident.

Organization: The NET Guard Program, which is part of the Cottonwood Heights Citizen Corps Council, falls under the direction of the City's Emergency Manager or designee. In a local emergency situation the Emergency Manager takes command of the teams, with the volunteer team leaders responsible for team management in the field. In a response beyond the City of Cottonwood Heights, the team may come under a different command and as such will follow the protocols of the Multiagency Coordination System. This includes operating under the command structure of National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS).

Citizen Corps Affiliation: There are currently over 50 active volunteers in the Radio Communications Service and more that can be available if needed. Using this group of volunteers as a base group to build from, the City continues to modify the Emergency Management Plan and the enhanced Emergency Operations Center by adding in the Citizen Corps Council, the CERT Teams the Neighborhood Watch leaders and the newly formed NET

Guard Mobile Response Program; the NET Guard Volunteers are now an integral part of the City's Citizen Corps Council.

Operational Support: With reference to emergency operations, Cottonwood Heights NET Guard volunteers support Emergency Support Function #2 – Communications. The NET Guard team has a structured activation protocol in place.

Roles and Responsibilities

Cottonwood Heights originally looked at the need for enhanced communication primarily from the aspect of a disaster or local emergency. For geographical and historical reasons, the basic concern was the possibility of a major earthquake. Data about the nature of the Wasatch Fault became key in determining what needs might arise. The City also took into account the real possibilities of a hazardous material release, pandemic, or terrorist attack.

The primary service area needs to be supported by Cottonwood Heights NET Guard Team are as follows:

- Facilitate the restoration of IT and communication systems in the event of an emergency to be done as quickly as possible with minimal disruption
- The continuity of government and provision of citizen information during a disaster or emergency
- The use of Geographic Information Systems to map the triage reports during an emergency to show the state and extent of injuries and damage, possible threats to utilities, and assist in determining adequate evacuation areas and routes
- Facilitation of quick response and communication establishment between First Responders and others working in a disaster area, and provision of accurate information back to decision makers (Emergency Operations Center)

The following needs were identified as underlying restoration of any essential City services and operations:

- It was determined that whatever restoration effort was undertaken needs to be mobile which facilitates the quick response and assistance to different areas of the city.
- Improved situational awareness and communications and information gathering capability even in the case of a main system failure

The following roles were identified for the NET Guard team:

- Establish area communications for First Responders using Mobile Technology Van (MTV)
- Help communicate the status of the incident and community to the EOC with minimal to no reliance on wired communication
- Use radio digital communication protocol to communicate real time status updates of all 11,000 households in the area using GIS informational mapping system.

Training

All Cottonwood Heights NET Guard volunteers are also CERT volunteers. They are required to take the full CERT basic training course. They can also decide to take other courses listed below based on need and interest:

- ICS 100/700 – Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System
- ICS 200 - ICS for Initial Action Incidents

- ICS 800 - National Response Plans, An Introduction

The City IT Manager hosted the NET Guard kickoff meeting and orientation. This was a loosely structured training. He then facilitated monthly meetings, aimed at enhancing team organization and implementation of the NET Guard concept.

Program Implementation

Recruitment: The City initially placed a recruitment article in the local newspaper. The City then started to rely on approaching CERT members and amateur radio operators to be involved in the NET Guard Program. This approach has been found to be successful. The City continues to use *The Valley Journal* (a community newspaper), Twitter, Facebook, and the Cottonwood Heights Web Page to continue recruitment.

Credentialing: All NET Guard team members are required to undergo a police background check. Viable skills are determined in an interview, followed up by observation and documentation during field exercises. Volunteers receive an ID card that can be used with a lanyard or a “stick on” ID which can contain their information as programmed.

NIMS modeling: The Cottonwood Heights NET Guard program follows the command structure of the National Incident Management Structure and the Incident Command System

Integration: The NET Guard program is part of the Cottonwood Heights Citizen Corps Council, and comes under the direction of the City’s Emergency Manager or designee. All NET Guard volunteers must also be CERT volunteers so the program is integrated in the city’s Emergency Operations Procedure through CERT.

Partnerships

Cottonwood Heights NET Guard partners with a number of organizations in varying capacities:

- Radio Emergency Communications Service structure involving radio amateurs within the City.
- The City of Holladay, Utah
- The City of Sandy, Utah
- The City of Midvale , Utah
- The City of Alta, Utah
- Salt Lake County Emergency Operating Center
- Salt Lake City Emergency Operating Center
- American Red Cross
- InfraGard

The City also works in an informal partnerships or agreements with the following organizations:

- Verizon
- Utah Communications Agency Network (UCAN)
- Utah Wireless Integrated Network (UWIN)
- Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES)
- Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES)

Activity to Date

NET Guard was involved in an exercise November 2010. This exercise tested the basics of the NET Guard Program and was part of a larger state-wide emergency communications exercise known as Utah SET 2010. This was the first time the NET Guard Volunteers and Mobile Technology Van were used in an exercise.

The NET Guard volunteer teams and MTV is expected to be used as a communications hub in the UTAH Shakeup 2012, a statewide earthquake drill that will be reviewed by FEMA. The drill is currently scheduled for mid-to-late 2012.

The NET Guard team took part in an exercise which simulated possible disaster scenario related outcomes within communities, and utilized a hierarchical reporting structure to disseminate information to the community. The team used a Geographic Information System (GIS) to show a map of how individual households were affected in a disaster. Exercise proved system was successful, efforts for improvement are ongoing.

Contacts

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