

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

In 2006, the Town of Newton participated in the Seabrook power plant emergency drill. I would like to thank all who made this drill a success as Newton again scored high marks. Special notes were made of Newton's professionalism and organization. I would also like to remind the residents that every year you get an information calendar from the State of NH. There is a lot of information concerning evacuation instructions and other important things to aid you in the unlikely event of a power plant disaster. There is also an information sheet in the calendar that gets mailed back to the state if there are disabled people in your family or you need help with evacuation. This is important as this data base determines who gets what assets during a radiological emergency at the power plant. The town of Newton will receive over \$10,000 to plan, drill and administer the Radiological Response Plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

Newton's roadways had some damage during a heavy rain event which affected the whole State in some way or another. There were some homes which received flooding. Over 30 flood kits were used by residents to aid in the clean up of basements. These kits were donated by the State and Red Cross. A big thanks for those resources. Newton is lucky that severe flooding does not adversely affect its infrastructure. 2006 was supposed to be a bad year for hurricanes. Although the northeast does not get hurricanes often, you should all have a plan in place in case all the right things happen for this to occur. We have been very lucky in the past as many hurricane systems have made a bee-line for our region only to get pushed out at the last minute by our prevailing westerly weather. As the hurricane disaster in the Gulf region illustrates, people cannot depend on the Federal Government to take care of everything before, during, and immediately after an event. This is not the responsibility of the Federal Government. This is the responsibility of every citizen. You must take care of your family and yourself. Pre-planning is the most important thing you can do. The feds come in after an event and it takes time to mobilize large scale RELIEF efforts. The Town of Newton has no facilities to house people in the event of a large scale event.

The Town has written agreements with the Red Cross to establish shelters for the residents of Newton. There is no guarantee that they will establish one here in Newton. You may have to travel to a "regional shelter" assets and scope of disaster will dictate location as shelters. Newton's shelter may have to be sacrificed for the "greater good" and be combined with ones in Haverhill, Lawrence or Methuen. There is only one backup powered building in Town and than can only house a few people. I will be working this year to power the Memorial School with a generator. The elementary school has a complete kitchen and should serve well as a shelter.

I have also been working with other local agencies in establishing a POD (point of distribution) for immunization. There is concern that the bird flu (H5-N1) virus will cause a pandemic. You might have been getting the updates in your local papers. There will be a POD located in Kingston for Newton residents to get their shots. The plan is not finalized yet so I will not go into greater detail in this report. More will come as it develops.

I would like to use this forum to point out the importance of your upcoming election and vote on warrant articles. There is one that asks for a large dollar amount to purchase land and for the construction of a new public safety complex on that land. There has been a committee working hard to bring forth a good plan and a plan that the voters need to consider long and hard before going to the polls. I can't speak for the Committee, the Fire Chief or the Police Chief but I can speak as the Emergency Management Director. The EOC, (Emergency Operations Center) is located at the Central Fire Station. It is stolen space from the fire dept. During a large scale event or disaster, this space becomes the focal point for a response, relief effort, and a focal point to direct local, state and other organizations. It is one of the most important locations in town. For this space to work properly, you must have proper work stations, communications, and sanitation facilities. You must have ample storage space. There needs to be proper ventilation in the building. There needs to be water when we lose power. A few years ago, this space was closed as it failed a fire and safety inspection. Short term corrections were made to the building. A band-aid approach was all that could be done. I have made the decision not to pursue warrant articles for upgrading our EOC. We need to abandon the band-aid approach to fixing these facilities. I solicited cost estimates from contractors to put on an addition to the current EOC and the best case scenario was \$160,000 for the addition and \$250,000 for the mandatory upgrades to the current building. There was a cost for adding a handicapped elevator as we must offer access to the EOC to everyone. A few years back, I was approached by a town resident who wanted to join our group. He was a skilled ham radio operator and a communications expert. He would have made a great addition to the team. There was only one problem. He was handicapped. His mobility was in decline but his mind was sharp and he was an asset. I had to decline him. You should have seen his face when I had to call him not an asset but a liability. I knew what I was doing was not only wrong but illegal. He begged for me to allow him to be carried upstairs and I had to decline. If this person wanted to he could have pursued the issue. Fortunately for us he did not. One day we will be forced to make changes. I hate to use scare tactics but reality is here. Newton's public safety facilities are dangerous, unhealthy, insufficient, illegal and outdated. Please consider what your public safety committee tells you. Contact the Fire and Police Chiefs and try to schedule a tour of their current facilities. You will be amazed at the working conditions and of the many deficiencies. Please consider this when you vote this March.

Respectfully,
John Owens
Emergency Management Director