

Preparing for disaster

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Agencies spread word about readiness for unexpected.

Too much water too fast has been an issue for many Gothenburg residents this summer.

Although Mother Nature cannot be controlled, knowing what to do before disasters happen can be helpful.

That was what 10 residents learned June 21 when they attended a business disaster preparedness workshop in city council chambers.

Representatives of four different agencies talked about weather awareness, planning and disaster recovery resources and what's been learned from past disasters.

Brian Woldt, Dawson County emergency management director, told of flooded basements throughout the county because of heavy rain and rising water tables.

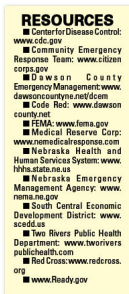
"But ours is minor compared to O'Neill and Norfolk," Woldt said.

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He reminded attendees that six inches of water will float cars.



“If you can’t see the road, then drive around it,” Woldt warned.

He also talked about a need for weather spotters for eyewitness accounts of approaching storms and information needed for credible weather warnings.

Anyone interested can access the National Weather Service website at espotter.weather.gov and sign up for eSpotter—an online weather reporting system.

To keep aware of storms, he reminded audience members of a radio frequency change—to 162.425 MHz—and reconfiguration of a National Weather Service transmitter at Johnson Lake to better serve residents of Dawson, Gosper, Phelps and Frontier counties.

CodeRED, a telephone communication service available for mass emergency notifications, is also available if people sign up.

Amy Elwood, emergency response coordinator/assistant director of Two Rivers Public Health Department, spoke about the need to plan ahead in case of disaster evacuations.

Elwood said businesses need to decide how to get supplies if shipments are interrupted.

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Planning before disasters also means a strategy for how to handle work if employees are stranded at the workplace or need to work from home, she noted.

“Businesses are on their own if there’s a disaster,” Elwood explained. “The Federal Emergency Management Agency doesn’t help until afterwards.”

Alison Raymond, disaster recovery coordinator for the South Central Economic Development District based in Holdrege, works to help businesses with long-term disaster recovery.

A key to recovery, Raymond said, is identifying essential business functions and planning for continuity of business when the unexpected happens.

“If disaster strikes, how could you come back?” she asked.

Considerations may include taking inventory to see which processes are crucial, assessing data and technology needs in case of power failure, reviewing insurance coverage, communicating an emergency plan to employees and sharing that plan with external organizations such as local government.

More information is available at www.ready.gov/business.

Raymond talked about a private sector preparedness program that started after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and has been accessed during the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

“It’s all about people organizing themselves ahead of time,” she said, noting that chamber of commerces have connections to help when disasters occur.

Kay Grinde, coordinator of the Dawson County Red Cross, focused on

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