



NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT'S ROLE IN AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER

When an emergency or disaster strikes a community, one of the best predictors of how well residents will fare is how well they know each other.

Knowing who your neighbours are, and what skills and resources they can provide in a time of need, is a critical part to any emergency preparedness strategy - one that is often overlooked or underestimated. Our role at Neighbourhood Support New Zealand is to encourage just that.

At our National Office in Wellington we work with, and support, our partners at the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), especially in the area of shared information and communications. If a major storm or earthquake were to strike tomorrow, NEMA knows they can rely on us to disseminate information quickly and effectively to our member organisations, who in return can provide their neighbours and supporters with important updates and advice.

Locally, Neighbourhood Support also fosters relationships between Civil Defence or Emergency Management agencies. This provides the opportunity for information to flow more quickly during an emergency or disaster. This also encourages ongoing collaboration throughout the year in the preparedness and prevention space.

One example of this working well around the country is with Otago Neighbourhood Support (ONS) who have developed a strong working relationship with Emergency Management Otago over the years. They are consulted about emergency response exercises and plans and take part in training and events. In one exercise in Mosgiel, Neighbourhood Support households acted as 'evacuees' for a flooding event. ONS volunteers also helped inform the local community of the exercise by distributing leaflets and following up with reminder phone calls. During the event ONS personnel were appointed to coordinate the welfare area. They assisted with collecting contact details from evacuees and directed them to medical help and other assistance.

Another way our members are able to assist their communities is through their local databases such as Gets Ready. Gets Ready is an online database platform which was developed by Canterbury Neighbourhood Support following the Canterbury Earthquake in 2010. It stores valuable household information such as the number of people living at each residence, emergency contact information, skills and resources available, as well as any serious conditions or special needs that Neighbourhood Support staff and volunteers or other personnel such as first responders need to be aware of. Gets Ready has since been rolled out to other areas across the country, allowing our members to better communicate with their community.

Whether it's disseminating preparedness advice, providing grab n' go bags to new residents, or simply encouraging neighbours to get to know each other, Neighbourhood Support's goal always remains the same: creating safe, resilient, and connected communities across Aotearoa.