WWU, City, and County collaborate on first-ever Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Survey

By Lynn Sterbenz, Bellingham Office of Emergency Management

Western Washington University's Resilience Institute is partnering with the City of Bellingham Office of Emergency Management and the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management to launch a disaster awareness and preparedness survey in Whatcom County.

Every year for the next 3-5 years, WWU students in a spring quarter course on disaster risk reduction planning will survey residents about their household and community preparedness. Students will also examine the risk awareness and preparedness of specific neighborhoods, groups, and service providers. As the project progresses, the data they collect will be used to improve community outreach and preparedness for earthquakes, floods, fires, storms and other significant disasters.

The survey teams will survey different areas of the city and county each year by going door to door to ask residents to participate. This method will establish baseline awareness and preparedness and evaluate changes over time. Progress in increasing awareness and preparedness from this survey will be evaluated through year-over-year comparisons of results.

Teams began Saturday, April 27 in two Bellingham neighborhoods, Fairhaven and Roosevelt, as well as the cities of Blaine and Lynden. WWU students, along with Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members, went door-to-door inviting residents to participate in the survey, which takes approximately 5-10 minutes. They will leave fliers and a link to an online survey if people are not home. Participants who complete the survey can enter to win one of several $25 gift certificates or prepaid VISA cards.
This project is supported by Western Washington University’s Sustainable Communities Partnership, which focuses the energy and ideas of faculty and students upon the issues that communities face as our society transitions to a more sustainable future. SCP facilitates a program in which Western courses complete community-engaged learning projects that address problems identified by the partner.

This spring and summer, handouts with the survey will also be distributed and collected at preparedness events, fairs, food truck gatherings, and other proceedings where county residents and visitors gather.

To take the online survey, visit https://tinyurl.com/WhatcomPS2019 For more information on the survey, contact Rebekah Paci-Green with the Department of Environmental Studies' Resilience Institute at 360-650-2707 or rebekah.paci-green@wwu.edu.

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