



Frisco Officials Answer the Call

By Nick Gordon

E-MER-GEN-CY - a sudden, urgent, usually unexpected occurrence or occasion requiring immediate action

By definition an emergency can happen at any time. It usually strikes with little or no warning, often with dire consequences. Being prepared for the unexpected can be the difference between life and death. In Frisco, city officials take the call to preparation seriously. And the results are impressive.

Frisco's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a room equipped with a wall of monitors where city officials can gather in the event of a crisis and view both local and national news; keep an eye on traffic through cameras positioned across Frisco and stay apprised of weather conditions. Located inside Frisco's Central Fire Station, the EOC contains transistor radios, Internet access and three different dispatch systems. The multiple communication devices are to help local police, fire rescue teams and other emergency vehicles

navigate the city efficiently during an emergency, when every minute counts.

While the EOC is an impressive sight, it's not the cutting-edge technology alone that enhances the safety of Frisco; it's the people in charge of it. Deputy Chief Paul Siebert and Fire Chief Mack Borchardt lead a department filled with firefighters and emergency personnel who are trained and ready to jump into action at a moment's notice. "What we do in the EOC is the same as what we do on an everyday basis, but on a larger scale," says Chief Borchardt who has served as Frisco's fire chief since 1979.

Chief Borchardt and Deputy Siebert, a Frisco firefighter since 1991 and chief officer since 2002, make sure that the EOC is always functional in case an emergency occurs. The room is under constant surveillance, and if Deputy Siebert or Chief Borchardt are not around, firefighters at the Frisco Central Fire Station are trained to keep the EOC up and running.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The only thing better than managing emergencies well is to take steps to prevent them from happening in the first place. Very few cities understand this concept as well as Frisco. According to Chief Borchardt, "Without the codes we have there would be much larger fires and businesses would be shut down longer."

Frisco was the second city in the State of Texas – one of 36 in the United States (out of 45,000 departments) – to receive the highest Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating of 'I' awarded by the Insurance Services Office, Inc (ISO). The rating is based on firefighting capabilities, the water system, traffic system and communications. "The ISO checks to make sure we have good codes that are enforced and maintained," says Chief Borchardt. What this means for the city of Frisco is, not only does the community live under the protection of one of the best fire departments in

Mayor Maher Maso, far right, speaks to a group at the Emergency Operations Center
photo by Chris Fritchie

the country, but also insurance is often cheaper for people and businesses located inside Frisco's city limits.

Achieving the highest ISO rating is also a result of the addition of six new fire stations built to ensure more rapid response times throughout the city (the average response time for a call to the fire department is five minutes, well below the national average); five front-line ambulances and two specialized vehicles. One, known as a heavy rescue vehicle, contains extra equipment for emergency situations that a regular fire truck or ambulance would not be able to handle.

It's very unusual for a city of Frisco's size to have both a hazmat truck and a heavy rescue vehicle. They are typically found in much larger cities.

The other vehicle is a hazmat truck, which specializes in picking up and containing hazardous materials. Both of the vehicles have cameras attached that can relay a live feed back to the EOC during emergency situations providing "real time" communications that may help personnel resolve escalating situations quickly. It's very unusual for a city of Frisco's size to have both a hazmat truck and a heavy rescue vehicle. They are typically found in much larger cities. In case of a severe accident, Frisco also has access to a designated helicopter pad. "Even though you can turn a parking lot into a helicopter pad, this is one of the very few in the nation built just for this purpose," says Chief Borchardt.

With all of the new commercial buildings going up in the city, Frisco has issued a strong fire code. The code requires the best sprinkler systems be installed in each building within the city limits so that fires can be extinguished before doing any real damage. However, if a fire does severely damage a structure, the fire department works with the planning and development department of Frisco to have city inspectors out to the scene of an emergency within a day or two to help get the building back in shape so that business can resume with as little disruption as possible.

Chief Borchardt explains that the code is intended to help keep people and property safe. "Our main function is prevention and our business community works well with us to maintain code compliance and we are very fortunate for that," he says.

The businesses of Frisco work well with the fire department in other ways, too. Downtown Frisco merchants and businesses allow the fire department to run training exercises using their buildings. The exercises involve the use of 100-foot ladders employing high-end rescue scenarios which require firefighters to repel from the top of a building to evacuate citizens and then put out a fire. "We have the most cooperative businesses I have ever seen," says Borchardt. "They are very safety conscious and they should be commended for that."

LENDING A HAND

Frisco is prepared not only for emergencies that may occur within her boundaries, but also is ready to help her neighbors. The community service response team spends about six to eight weeks on the coast during hurricane season helping communities ravaged by violent weather. This team provided aid for victims of both hurricanes Katrina and Ike, and helps with grass fires that often break out across the state. "We have been very fortunate that we have been called to help others more than we have had to call for aid ourselves," says Borchardt. "And our goal is to keep it that way."

Nick Gordon is a freelance writer living in Frisco.

Frisco Strikes Gold Hosting Winter Games

By Nick Gordon

THE WINTER GAMES OF TEXAS returned to the city of Frisco for their sixth year in what proved to be the best yet. For those not familiar with them, the Winter Games are competitive events modeled after the Olympics with the winner of each event receiving a medal. On January 17 and 18, amateur athletes from all over the state gathered in the Frisco area to compete in one of 14 events, including basketball, bowling, dance, figure skating, fencing, flag football, gymnastics, karate, ice hockey, rock climbing, soccer, swimming, table tennis and wrestling. While the games mostly involved children, athletes of all ages competed; from toddlers to senior citizens.

The athletes and spectators are not the only ones that got a boost from the games this year. The Frisco economy also reaped rewards thanks to the numerous sports venues including: Frisco Independent School District stadiums and Warren Sports Complex. According to a study conducted by economics majors at the University of North Texas, the 17,000 spectators who came to the 2008 Winter Games spent about 1.5 million dollars while attending the events. This includes money spent on hotels, restaurants and additional entertainment while in Frisco. The city of Plano, which hosted the popular gymnastics portion of the games, also benefited from revenue generated by those attending the weekend event.

The Winter Games could not happen without the help of volunteers and sponsors. This year, more than 250 people offered their time to judge events, run booths and officiate. Officials of the games expressed their gratitude to the sponsors who provided financial support for the games as well as donations to help both volunteers and athletes.

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