

# Halton not ready for the Community Emergency Response Volunteers Ontario program

By Gloria Hildebrandt

The Community Emergency Response Volunteers Ontario program (CERV) was announced on September 10, 2002, a year after the attacks in the U.S. It will become part of the Ontario government's emergency response and management program. CERV is intended to be a province-wide network of neighbourhood-based teams of volunteers who are trained in basic emergency management skills. It is hoped that retired police officers, firefighters and paramedics will volunteer to work with front-line responders during any disasters or emergencies. Once the program and materials are established, the plan is for municipal emergency management co-ordinators to train local volunteers to handle local hazards and risks.

It appears that the provincial government has been premature in announcing the CERV program this spring and inviting volunteers to contact their municipality. The municipalities aren't ready. Training materials from seven municipalities in a province-wide pilot program for CERV need to be completed. The province also needs to determine a good model program for the municipalities to use.

"The Region and the four municipalities endorse CERV," says Wayne Gould, Halton Region Emergency Planning Co-ordinator, "but it will take a couple of months before it can be introduced." Gould says that Halton's community emergency management co-ordinators (CEMC) will meet over the next few months to consider CERV and other new required emergency measures. Fire Chief Harold Penson is CEMC for Milton, and Deputy Fire Chief Brian Ellsworth is CEMC for Halton Hills.

Ellsworth explains that CERV is only one part of new emergency efforts called for in Bill 148, which is an amendment to the province's Emergency Planning Act. Other elements are risk assessments, emergency plans and public education. Having CERV in place this spring may not be a priority. "I'm in agreement with Bill 148, but the province's timeframes are short," Ellsworth says. "Bigger cities may be further down the road. This is something we'll look at in future. We have to meet essential levels first, by April 4, 2004."

The provincial government is promoting Emergency Preparedness Week, from May 4 to

10. However, Ellsworth explains, "Halton Hills currently has nothing planned for Emergency Preparedness Week." He mentions a 24-page Personal Emergency Preparedness Guide, which is available in PDF format at [www.region.halton.on.ca](http://www.region.halton.on.ca).

Despite being behind the province's schedule, Ellsworth says, "I have a good comfort level that Halton Hills could mitigate any emergency." The Region's Web site outlines what has recently been organized for large-scale emergencies. An Emergency Control Group, chaired by Brent Marshall, has been formed, consisting of professionals who are trained to co-ordinate emergency response services. Halton Region has an Emergency Plan that outlines roles and functions of key officials, emergency response services and groups in the community. Increased security measures have been introduced at all Halton water supply facilities.

With public concern over SARS, West Nile virus and even possible bio-chemical attacks, the need for Halton Region, Halton Hills and Milton to develop clear emergency programs is obvious.



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