



# **MILL VALLEY RESILIENT BUSINESS PILOT PROJECT**

**PROGRESS REPORT TO  
MARIN DISASTER COUNCIL & CITIZEN CORPS ON  
ESSENTIAL BUSINESS DISASTER RESILIENCE  
(EBDR)**

MARCH 6, 2014

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Marin Disaster Council and Citizen Corps (DC3) and Marin Economic Forum (MEF) are collaborating to improve the emergency preparedness level and resilience of the business community county-wide. An initial effort entitled “Essential Business Disaster Resilience” (EBDR) focused on helping businesses “essential” to the recovery of the entire community after a disaster. The City of Mill Valley launched a pilot project to design and test processes, tools and templates to help selected essential businesses prepare for and recover from disasters more quickly. The underlying long-range objective was to devise a primarily self-administered program to spread disaster preparedness best practices to a range of businesses with a minimum of facilitation by emergency professionals.

Reflecting on the progress/results of the pilot project to date, much has been accomplished since its initiation, with the highlights being:

- Red Cross’s ReadyRating.com evaluation was selected as the tool to make a baseline measurement of the businesses’ disaster preparedness and to identify steps to improve their preparedness.
- 26 businesses in Mill Valley were invited to participate in the project and 22 have successfully completed the initial evaluation step, a surprisingly high participation rate.
- The initial ReadyRating scores for Mill Valley ranged from 23 to 88 (on a scale of 0 to 123), a wide spread not uncommon for a small town.
- Some common improvement opportunities were identified, particularly in manager/staff training, records/information storage, emergency role practice, Business Continuity Plans and community involvement.
- A business resilience workshop, including an interactive exercise called Resilientville, was well received.

Key lessons learned during the pilot to date which would apply toward a broader County-wide program in the future include:

- Business owners and manager are genuinely interested in disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience as demonstrated by the high initial response rate and their attitudes during the pilot.
- Small businesses are frequently “fighting fires” day to day in order to survive, so maintaining a focus on this effort has proven challenging.
- Gaining involvement of larger chain businesses has been more difficult.
- The ReadyRating tool has proven very helpful, but it presents some challenges too.
- The initial evaluation process has required considerable facilitation from the project staff which might be difficult to sustain unless outside resources were found to support this project.
- A focus on Business Continuity Plans is key.

Based on the progress to date and lessons learned, the team plans to focus next on the following steps:

- Work with 3-5 selected businesses to help them prepare Business Response and Continuity Plans based both on a template the team has devised and on a readily available template through FEMA's [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) web site. This will test the two templates and provide an estimate of staff time to support them to see which approach provides the best results.
- Provide some additional training classes.
- Acknowledge the businesses who have participated to date.
- Assemble a self-help Business Disaster Preparedness Toolkit which can be provided to all interested businesses.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to present the Resilientville exercise to a broader audience of Mill Valley businesses.

## **II. PILOT PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### **A. DC3/MEF Collaboration**

In mid-2011, the Marin Disaster Council and Citizen Corps (DC3) decided to launch new efforts to improve the emergency preparedness level of the business community in Marin. DC3 reached out to the Marin Economic Forum (MEF), the successor organization to the Marin Economic Council, an advisory board to the Marin Board of Supervisors, to appoint a representative from their organization to serve on the DC3 representing business. The MEF appointed Garry Lion to be the business representative.

DC3's Public Disaster Education and Preparedness (PDEP) Committee invited the business representative to join their committee to infuse a business perspective in their efforts. PDEP subsequently conducted a survey of government agencies, non-profits, businesses and health care agencies concerning their disaster preparedness efforts (published March 2012). The survey resulted in two broad PDEP recommendations to DC3 (still being worked) focusing on expanded Disaster Service Worker Training and establishment of a County-wide Disaster Coordinator position. In addition, since the survey found little coordinated efforts focused on businesses, PDEP agreed to support a pilot project focused on developing a process and some tools and templates to engage businesses more effectively in disaster preparedness.

### **B. Pilot Project Objectives**

The specific objective of the pilot project was to improve the emergency preparedness/ resilience of a select group of businesses considered essential to the recovery of the entire community following a disaster. The challenge was to improve the likelihood of these businesses following a disaster to stay open (or reopen as soon as possible) to serve the community. Enabling these businesses to re-open their doors soon after a disaster would be a boon to the businesses themselves, to the residents who rely on them, and indirectly to the local government through taxes. This "essential" selection criteria made this a very high priority group to concentrate on, and helped the business to understand the community was counting on them (i.e., this was not just their self- survival). The project was dubbed "Essential Business Disaster Resilience" ("EBDR" for short).

But the boarder underlying objective as mentioned above is to use this pilot project as an opportunity to develop processes, select tools/workshops (e.g., website self- evaluation surveys) and design templates (e.g. forms or checklists) to eventually create a mechanism to help businesses County-wide. Ideally, this mechanism would be self- motivating and self-administered so it would be sustainable without a lot of outside staff support. The “pilot” concept is key because no one had done this type of project before, so the amount of labor and timeframe involved was unknown at the outset. In addition, resetting the direction (mid-course corrections) might be appropriate based on lessons learned.

**C. Mill Valley Organization**

With a highly advanced emergency preparedness track record and an outstanding Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC), the City of Mill Valley agreed to execute this pilot project in conjunction with the American Red Cross (ARC). The project organization was as follows:

| <b>Role</b>       | <b>Name</b>            | <b>Organizational Affiliations</b>                |
|-------------------|------------------------|---|
| Project Oversight | Garry Lion             | MV City Council, MEF, DC3, PDEP                   |
| Project Manager   | Jeff Davidson          | MV Fire Chief                                     |
| Lead Consultant   | Maggie Lang            | MV EP Consultant, CERT, Get Ready, PDEP           |
| Tools/Workshops   | Elaine Howard          | ARC, PDEP   |
| Advisors          | Ron Vidal<br>Tom Welch | MV EPC, MV Chamber Of Commerce<br>MV Fire Marshal |

Maggie Lang has been the primary staff participant on the pilot project with the financial support and project leadership of the Mill Valley Fire Department and tools/workshop support of the ARC. This has involved a substantial commitment of staff hours, consultant hours (110 hours) and volunteer hours which made this pilot project possible without any DC3 budget or resources. The project participants are to be thanked for their generosity, dedication and hard work.

**D. Initial Work Plan**

The originally envisioned work steps in the pilot project included in essence:

1. Select/customize tools to measure readiness/preparedness quantitatively
2. Identify essential businesses and invite participation
3. Measure readiness of each business
4. Conduct workshops and training to help businesses improve
5. Support businesses to close gaps (capture low-hanging fruit)
6. Measure the improvement in readiness
7. Acknowledge participants

Since this was a pilot project, the project team recognized that the work plan might be adjusted as we learned from our experiences.

### **E. Targeted Businesses**

The businesses considered “essential” to the recovery in Mill Valley following a disaster include:

- Hardware/Building Supplies
- Groceries
- Restaurants
- Gas Stations
- Banks
- Hotels
- Pharmacies
- Pet Care Facilities
- Utilities

While these are not the only businesses important to get the community functional following a disaster, they were deemed especially helpful. Some other businesses such as emergency medical care would be critical, but Mill Valley did not have those businesses physically inside the city limits.

### **III. Progress/ Results to Date**

Much has been accomplished since the initiation of the project in late 2012, but the following summarizes the key activities and results to date.

#### **A. Evaluation Tool Selected**

The project team selected an on-line survey tool to create a baseline measurement of emergency preparedness for the participating businesses. Multiple tools were investigated including Red Cross’s ReadyRating.com evaluation, Small Business Bureau’s PrepareMyBusiness tool and San Francisco’s CARD (Community Agencies Responding to Disaster) template. **The** Red Cross Ready Rating Program was chosen due to its off-the-shelf availability, use of a numerical rating score, and available staff support. Partnering with the Red Cross was seen as advantageous from the viewpoint of credibility with community businesses and an opportunity to learn from ARC previous experience in working with San Francisco area businesses.

#### **B. Businesses Enrolled**

A mixture of large corporate & locally owned businesses were initially included. A letter from the Mayor (Appendix B1) was sent to each business, explaining the purpose and scope of the project and requesting their cooperation. The team decided to delay inclusion of utilities

(energy, communications, etc.) until a later phase because they already have advanced emergency recovery plans on a regional basis and did not have local offices in Mill Valley. This left 26 local businesses initially contacted.

The project team contacted Business owners/managers and made personal appointments to explain the project, expectations and outcome goals for individual businesses. Handouts were provided including:

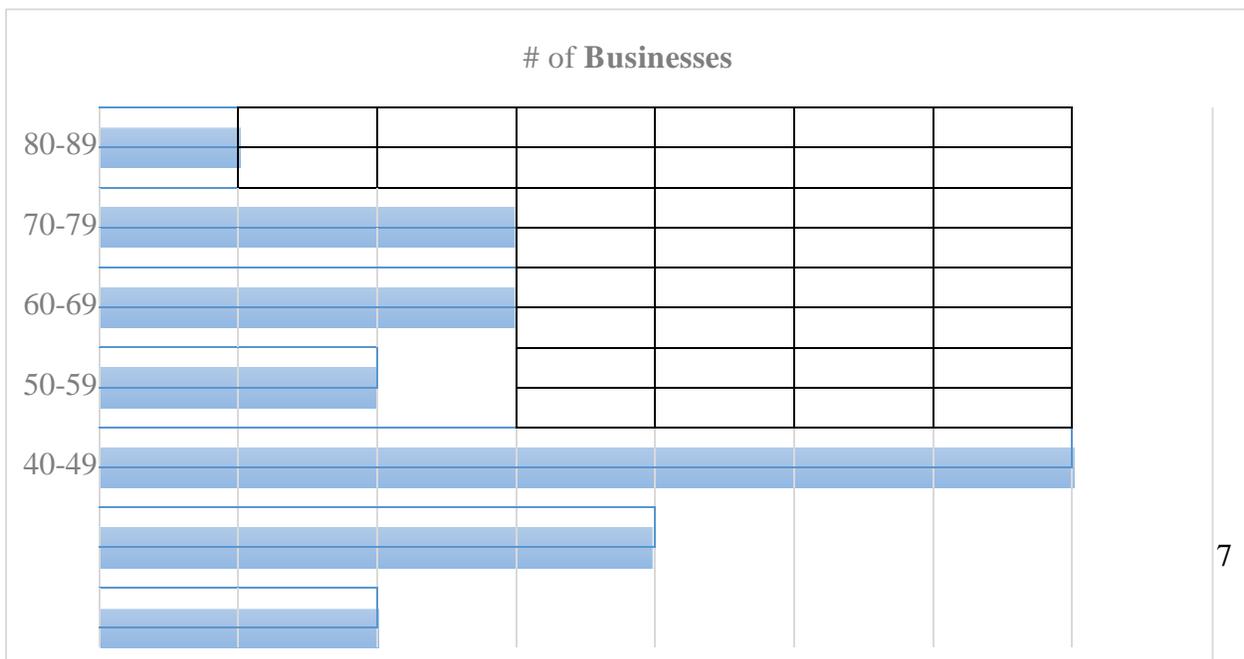
- Business Disaster Preparedness Worksheet (Appendix B2)
- Phases of the pilot project (Appendix B3)
- Components & rating system of the Ready Rating tool (Appendix C)
- FEMA brochure on Business Emergency Plans (Appendix B5)
- Document explaining the importance of planning for emergencies from Red Cross/Federal Express Conference (Appendix B6)

Of the 26 businesses contacted, 22 completed the pilot initial evaluation (Appendix A for a list of participating businesses). Of the four that did not participate:

- One business was on the verge of closing in the near future
- One business refused
- One business was not able to participate without corporate approval and the team was never able to reach the corporate contact
- One business did not complete the survey tool despite multiple requests

### C. Initial Assessment Completed

Although business representatives were initially offered to take the survey online at their convenience, verbally guiding business representatives through the survey was necessary with 90% of the participating businesses. The Red Cross Ready Rating score, on a scale of 0 to 123, ranged from 23 to 88 for our participants. In general, the large organizations such as banks scored higher and the smaller local retailers scored lower. The distribution of ReadyRating scores was as follows:



30-39

20-29

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Once the survey tool was completed (18 page survey; Appendix C), a copy of “Next Steps” from the Red Cross (12 page summary; Appendix D) was made available to business representatives. The Project Team further summarized this into a 2-3 page summary (Appendix E) of suggested improvements to the business’ emergency plan and forwarded it to the business owner/manager. Businesses were encouraged to update their emergency plans with the Red Cross’s suggestions.

In addition to the Ready Rating scores, the Project Team evaluated the businesses based on their inclusion of eight central elements of an Emergency Response Plan and four elements of a Business Continuity Plan as identified by questions presented in the Ready Rating tool (Key Elements in Appendix F).

Of those 22 that did complete the survey tool, the following percentage of the businesses satisfied these Key Elements:

- Administrative Support: 100%
- Completed a Hazard Vulnerability Assessment: 95%
- Completed a Hazard Mitigation Assessment of facility: 86%
- Spoken with insurance agent re: coverage: 64%
- Have a written Emergency Plan: 68%
- Have a leadership structure in place in event of emergencies: 77%
- Have a system for storing emergency contacts for managers/staff: 73%
- Have system for storing records safely both online & off; both onsite & off: 86%
- Have safety equipment & staff knows location & use: 68%
- Have a system for back-up plans for vendors in event of emergency: 36%
- Have trained staff for at least 5 of 9 listed emergency areas: 45% o
- Have at least one form of emergency drill/exercise annually: 27% o
- Plan is updated annually: 50%
- Have a Business Continuity Plan (BCP):23%
- Have a financial back-up plan for conducting transactions without power or equipment: 45%
- Have a back-up plan for alternate facility: 50%
- Have training on BCP: 5%
- BCP updated annually: 18%
- Outreach into community re: emergency preparedness: 5%

None of the businesses had incorporated all of these elements into their plans.

#### **D. Gaps/Improvement Opportunities Identified**

Throughout the pilot program, several areas for improvement in the businesses' ability to respond to a disaster and to reestablish operations in a timely fashion were identified. The primary areas for improvement in many, but not all, businesses are as follows:

- Training of Managers/Staff in shelter-in-place, evacuation and continuity of operations
- More up-to-date methods of business records storage & staff contact information storage
- Establishment of employee emergency roles & practice thereof (i.e., drills)
- Establishment of Business Continuity Plans for the recovery phase after a disaster
- Identifying ways to be more involved in the community in preparedness efforts

#### **E. Resilient Business Workshop Presented**

A Resilient Business Workshop, hosted by Chamber of Commerce and Mill Valley Fire Department, was held for project participants in June, 2013. Representatives from six businesses, the Red Cross and community leaders participated. Red Cross presenters introduced the basics of emergency planning through discussions and exercises and participants were encouraged to take new information and findings to expand/update their emergency plans. The exercise, "Resilientville", was presented and business representatives were able to role play being community members in a fictitious town which suddenly experiences an earthquake. They could then see how their day-to-day roles & perspectives would change in the aftermath of a disaster.

A second workshop was subsequently scheduled for other businesses, but had to be cancelled due to last minute cancellations.

### **IV. Lessons Learned**

As a result of the above progress and results, the team has learned a lot about what might and might not work well in a broader program focused on county-wide businesses.

#### **A. Initial Support from Businesses Was Strong**

Business owners/managers were genuinely interested in creating a safer environment for themselves & their staff and in re-establishing business operations as soon as possible following a disaster, thus aiding the community in the aftermath of a large-scale emergency. Twenty-two of twenty-six business invited without prior contact agreed to participate and completed the initial assessment. Several had creative ideas for engagement with the community during a disaster recovery period.

#### **B. Maintaining Priority Focus of Managers/Employees Was Challenging**

While the business owners/managers were easy to work with, sustaining their focus was challenging during the pilot project due to several factors:

- Seasonal constraints from October through January in retail businesses hinder involvement in outside projects
- Managerial turn-over/transfers coupled with a lack of continuity between the previous and new manager hampered progress
- Scheduling demands on managers/owners created challenges in engagement with project staff
- A low percentage of the businesses' managers/employees live in or near Mill Valley

While these problems are probably endemic when working with small retail businesses, we need to find some better approaches for captivating and retaining management attention.

### **C. Penetration of Larger Chain Businesses Was More Difficult**

As mentioned before, the team decided not to pursue utility companies. However the pilot businesses did include some larger chain companies such as banks, gasoline retailers, supermarkets and pharmacies. Identifying and contacting Regional Supervisors for certain branch businesses which relied on regional headquarters for decision making was problematic. This created delays in participation for several businesses and eliminated one.

### **D. Ready Rating has Pros and Cons**

The Ready Rating survey has been very helpful in providing an objective baseline assessment of emergency preparedness with a numerical score. It is strongly supported by the American Red Cross and their staff was very helpful in facilitating its utilization. Some challenges in working with the Ready Rating survey tool include:

- Getting to the survey section itself is somewhat cumbersome
- Questions are often redundant
- The survey never actually confirms that the business has a written business plan; it deals just with the components
- The survey is time consuming so business owners felt they didn't have the time to take the survey independently online, but they were willing to go through it with the Project Team member
- Lack on Internet access at certain businesses created difficulty in completing the survey tool as managers' only option was completing the tool at home on their own time
- The tool is somewhat Red Cross-centric in that it ties in with other Red Cross initiatives which were not relevant to our project.

### **E. Significant Facilitation Was Needed from Project Staff**

While the team had hoped the Ready Rating tool specifically could be self-initiated and self-administered by each business, we have found that considerable staff support has been required.

Only 2 of the businesses were able to complete their initial Ready Rating evaluation without significant project team assistance (several hours per business on average). In order for this program to be sustainable, it will be necessary to develop resources that can be easily accessible, generic and can be implemented with minimal staff guidance or support.

This caused additional reliance on the project staff, which we only had because of the generosity of the Mill Valley Fire Department who assigned their Emergency Preparedness Consultant to help on this pilot project. It also created delays in the project when the key project staff was not available for a period of time.

### **E. Business Continuity Planning Is Key**

In identifying areas for acknowledgement, as well as potential improvement in creating/updating business response plans, eight key elements of a **Business Response Plan** were identified, including:

- Did they have a written emergency plan?
- Did they have a list of emergency supplies and did their staff know where they were located?
- Did they include training for emergencies, including orienting any new hires?

In addition, four elements of a **Business Continuity Plan** were identified, including:

- Did they have a Business Continuity Plan in place?
- Did they have an alternate site if the original facility was damaged?

This was a helpful tool for comparison and to identify tangible areas for businesses to focus on when improving their emergency plans

### **V. Next Steps**

Since this is a pilot project, the Task Force is continuing to learn from completed steps and is adjusting the work plan to focus on those opportunities which appear to represent the best chance of developing a successful program for business emergency preparedness. The following next steps are recommended.

#### **A. Test Emergency Planning Templates with Selected Participants**

The Project Team researched multiple disaster planning sources to identify existing emergency business plan templates which were simple, relatively short yet comprehensive. The Team also created its own draft plan template (Appendix G). This template, along with the Ready.gov Business Emergency Plan will be tested with a sub-set of 3-5 project participants over the next several months. This sub-set of businesses will not only provide feedback regarding the two plans but will help determine the staff time needed to support individual businesses in creating/updating their emergency plans. This should help the participating businesses improve their

emergency preparedness and resilience in a measurable way on a revised Ready Rating score.

### **B. Offer Additional Training Classes**

In response to Red Cross recommendations and requests from the business community, a First Aid class for Merchants was held on Feb. 19, 2014. Representatives from 9 businesses attended and were provided training in basic first aid taught by Mill Valley Fire Department personnel. A home disaster preparedness course, Get Ready, is scheduled for March 29 for business managers & staff and will be hosted by one of our participating businesses. Opportunities for additional classes will be evaluated.

### **C. Acknowledge Participants**

With great appreciation, we wish to acknowledge those participating businesses who have worked with the Project Team over the past year. This might include recognizing the pilot project businesses at a City Council meeting, a special Chamber of Commerce function, news media event and presentation of a Red Cross window emblem. This will hopefully encourage other businesses to participate in the future.

### **D. Develop Business Disaster Preparedness Toolkit**

In looking at methods to sustain the support of businesses in being as prepared for a large-scale emergency as possible, the Project Task Force has discussed the possibility of developing a Business Disaster Preparedness Toolkit. This would be provided to any interested business in Mill Valley but especially to any new business coming into town. This toolkit will likely include:

- Hazard Assessment Tool identifying local hazards (Appendix B7)
- Business Disaster Preparedness Worksheet (Appendix B2)
- Preparedness Assessment Tool, such as Ready Rating to establish current level of preparedness
- FEMA brochure on Emergency Plans for Businesses (Appendix B5)
- Emergency Response & Continuity Plan Template (Appendix G)

### **E. Organize Chamber Presentation**

The pilot program accessed businesses from a bottom-up approach, i.e., they were selected and invited to participate. Consideration should be given to future access from a top-down or collaborate approach through targeted groups such as chambers of commerce, service clubs, or professional organizations. Therefore, a presentation hosted by the Mill Valley Chamber of Commerce is suggested to highlight the need for emergency planning and introduction of Emergency Toolkit for Businesses, along with the Resilientville exercise. This will hopefully generate some volunteer participants in subsequent resilience projects.