

# Lake County Public Health officials to conduct CASPER survey to assess emergency preparedness



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LAKE COUNTY, Calif. – Lake County Public Health officials are overseeing a first-of-its-kind survey in Lake County that will look at how prepared local residents are for potential disasters.

Later this month the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response – or CASPER – survey will take place in neighborhoods around Lake County, according to Lake County Public Health Office Dr. Karen Tait.

To the best of Tait's knowledge, Lake County is the first area in California to use the CASPER survey.

"It's actually something that we're doing voluntarily," she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects, Health Studies Branch developed CASPER to enable government at all levels to rapidly assess a community's health needs after a disaster, as well as to measure household preparedness for disasters or emergencies.

In Lake County's case, Tait said it's meant to measure preparedness and help her staff know how to best respond in times of disaster to help meet the community's needs.

Tait, who is overseeing the local work, said that among its many benefits, the CASPER survey is "a rare opportunity for local, state and federal agencies to coordinate at the field level."

Such work often is challenging and messy in real disasters, she pointed out, so it's a good practice exercise.

Coming as it does following a summer of wildland fires that threatened Lake County communities, "It's really perfect timing," she said.

The survey will take place Monday, Nov. 26, through Wednesday, Nov. 28, in Nice, Lucerne, Clearlake Oaks, Clearlake, Clearlake Park, Middletown, Hidden Valley Lake, Cobb, Lakeport and Kelseyville, according to Tait.

Spring Valley, which Tait said the county had planned to survey before August's Wye Fire, will be the focus of a separate and specific CASPER survey.

Fifteen two-member survey teams will visit neighborhoods, going door to door, looking to locate seven respondent households within each census block. Tait said team members will have signage on their cars and will carry identification cards.

She said survey team members will include epidemiologists from neighboring counties, state public health personnel, public health students and some of the county's own public health nurses.

They will not be collecting any personal information and will only conduct the work during the daytime, Tait said.

Tait said that, at the same time, there will be teams working in some neighborhoods to conduct air quality measurements in order to find evidence of geothermal venting, a phenomenon that's been seen in parts of the county.

By Friday, Nov. 30, Tait anticipates having some initial analysis completed on the results. "It should be fairly fast."

## How the process works

Tait and her staff began planning for the survey in June. "It's been a pretty intensive planing process for us," she said, adding that they're also getting a lot out of it in terms of experience and information.

Lake County Public Health is offering much more local support than CDC is accustomed to, said Tait. "We decided to make it a kind of logistical exercise for ourselves."

Tait said the CASPER process involves choosing 30 census tracts within Lake County that are weighted toward more populated areas. Seven houses within each tract are then selected at random.

In Spring Valley, where a separate CASPER is being undertaken, 14 households will be surveyed, Tait said.

Tait said there will be questions about disaster preparedness, health needs and knowledge of safe drinking water sources.

The survey teams also will ask residents about how to best communicate with others during disaster, hearing or vision impairment issues, how they have planned for their health care needs, their particular disaster-related concerns and barriers to their own disaster planning, and if they will evacuate during disasters and, if not, why not, Tait said.

It's important for people to realize that they're not being graded on their answers, Tait added.

She said those answers should be interesting and, in fact, could provide surprises during analysis.

Tait said she has frequently heard from community members that they want to be included in the planning process for disasters, and the survey will offer that chance.

The information from the survey can be used in future planning efforts. Tait said she hopes to have the community's help in identifying gaps in the local government's response.

She said Lake County Public Health had a limited role in responding to the Wye Fire, including helping get medications to an evacuee and providing support to the evacuation shelter but noted, "There was room for improvement."

All of the advance planning and information gathering from the CASPER work will help them in the future, she added.

Tait said community members who have questions about the CASPER survey or the teams visiting neighborhoods can call Lake County Public Health at 707-263-1090 .

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