

FLASH SHEET # 9 - DISASTER PLANNING
Gracia Janes Environment Convener

Disasters such as the horrifying fires in British Columbia this summer and fall and the almost province-wide power black out of up to 2 days, in Ontario, ought to make us all pause (once more) to consider how frail our level of physical and social comfort is. The wake up call should have come in 1998, when Quebec suffered through a lengthy power backout and the chaos of a horrendous winter ice storm, or, when Winnipeg endured numerous floodings of the Red River, or the eastern provinces found themselves in the midst of floods eg. the "catastrophic Lac St. Jean area" or, or, or!

In response to the latest disasters, President Catharine Laidlaw Sly has just sent out an urgent call for Councils and NOS members to investigate the state of "Disaster Emergency Plans" in their communities. I know that here in Niagara, the Red Cross was serving Crispy Cream donuts to people a few days after the power outages, along with a disaster planning information booklet. In Hamilton Ontario, our Council of Women members have participated in disaster planning exercises and as a result of this the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario has excellent policy that advocates:

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- * the strengthening of the Ontario Emergency Planning Act to better encourage/enforce emergency planning and audits and practices in the community,

- * the involvement of providers of home care, disabled and seniors, and other vulnerable groups in disaster planning,

- * the involvement of the women's anti-violence network in disaster planning and during disasters,

- * the investigation and provision of safeguards against internet terrorism, and

- * the improvement of emergency training and information for the public."

And, Hamilton Council, with expert May Toth in the lead, continues to urge even more updated policies.

Nevertheless there is much more to be accomplished! As President Catharine has pointedly asked NCWC members,

"* WHAT ARE THE DISASTER EMERGENCY PLANS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?"

- * ARE THERE PAMPHLETS WITH UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION AVAILABLE?

- * WHAT SERVICES ARE READY FOR SENIORS OR OTHERS WITH SERIOUS HEALTH MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS ?

- * ARE THESE PLANS REGULARLY REVIEWED AND UPDATED?

- * WHAT CAN WE DO TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT PART OF THE PROBLEM?

In line with this last point, as your Environment Convener, and having experienced only the Ontario disaster, I am particularly aware of the potential environmental impacts, and the risks to health, and potential for social disorder, should we not take precautionary steps- we being our selves, our governments, and society in general. **I'm sure we can think of many changes that need to be made, so if you have any ideas, please send them along to me at jrjan@sympatico.ca or by snail mail to Gracia Janes, Box 1590 Niagara-on-the-Lake ON LOS IJO**

For instance, in the Globe and Mail to-day, there were some good ideas in a thoughtful article

(*Paranoid and prudent: Chaos looms, be prepared-* September 8, 2003) by William Thorsell, former Editor in Chief of the paper and now director and CEO of the Royal Ontario Museum. In pointing out the particularly frightening chances of a re occurrence of the power outage on an even greater scale, and the very ominous thought that a city as large as Toronto, with over 2.5 million people might have no hydro, food, water, or heat for extended periods, he asked some very important questions For instance he queried “ ***If the power had been out for two weeks, how would the food supply system have coped? No lights or refrigeration in the supermarkets. Panic buying where food was available at all. How long would social peace last in face of a food shortage, in a city of 2.5 million people accustomed to ordering in and taking out ?***”

Mr. Thorsell also came up with some practical solutions , which if implemented should help “***avoid its (a power outage) most predictable horrors.***” For instance, water being the most important thing, a “***reliable , robust backup power capacity ... capable of keeping it functional for at least 60 days.***”.. “ ***households should stock drinking water for at least two weeks” and for food “ a month’s supply...***” . He also recommended that “***public authorities***”...***should “ develop plans to support many thousands more should power fail for weeks at -20C.***”

Given the impetus of personal experience with disaster (or not, but with a practical mind and imagination) members of NCWC and others should be able to suggest many other practical ideas. I would be happy to collect these and pass them on to our National Council of Women President, (who will send them on to the relevant authorities), as well as post them in my Flash Sheets over the next several months. .

Remember, if we are not part of the solution, we could well be part of the problems caused by disasters in the future!