



Neighbor Pods

Neighbor Pods create the essential foundation for our rural community's disaster response. Whether it's fire, earthquake, or an intense storm, Pods can help us all survive and cope.

Being in a Pod means mutual aid, to the extent that you are able. It does not mean you must take responsibility for everyone else. Rather, everyone makes a commitment to help each other.

A Pod is roughly five adjacent households — it could be more or fewer, depending on your geography and local conditions. You want to be close enough to be able to check on each other in an emergency.

Pods also form the basic unit for our emergency phone tree. The phone tree will get word out quickly about fires, evacuation, or other emergency information, or can relay urgent messages back to the FRVFD.

Let's Start

Invite your neighbors for a meeting (or barbeque, afternoon tea, or potluck brunch). We suggest one or two meetings to get organized, then a meeting every six months or so to update plans. Remember to include renters. Absentee owners, and neighbors who chose not to get involved, can at least be kept informed. Make sure everyone is in the phone tree, at minimum.

Tips for meetings: Keep the “business” part focused and not too long— about one-and-half hours, max. Make sure everyone has a chance to be heard. Set realistic goals. Enlist help and spread tasks fairly. Schedule next meeting at the current one. Remind people of next meeting a few days before. And thank everyone for taking part!

Your Pod's Essential Steps

1) *Inventory yourselves and share information.*

• Fill out the **FRVFD survey form** at your first meeting. Extra survey forms can be downloaded from www.frvfd.org. This inventory gives the VFD, and your Pod, crucial information about peoples' needs, resources, and hazards. This form goes to the VFD, but you should copy or otherwise share this info with your Podsters. Example: where

Quick Quiz: What's a Pod?

- how aliens take over in “Invasion of the Body Snatchers”
- a new-fangled music gizmo
- seed capsules
- neighborhood emergency self-help groups
- all of the above

Essential Steps

- 1) Inventory yourselves and share information.
- 2) Create a basic, simple plan to cope with disasters.
- 3) Work out communications.
- 4) Encourage every household to stock emergency supplies.

are essential water tanks and possible hazards at your place? Who has special skills (medical, road clearing, firefighting...)? Who has special needs (young children, elders, disabled...)? In addition, consider exchanging emergency contact info (a relative/friend outside the area).

- Ambitious Pods might take a **tour** of everyone's place as their second meeting. Evaluate potential problems. See for yourself where the propane shut-off valve is, where the crowbar and the cat carrier are kept...

2) *Create a basic, simple plan to cope with disasters.*

- **Discuss responses and actions** within your possibilities. Different emergencies need different responses. A wildfire needs essential info dispersed quickly via the phone tree, and evacuation routes clarified. A major earthquake requires checking for injuries, start-up fires, and building collapse. Talk it through and get a sense of what you can (and can't) do, and what you'll need to have on-hand. FRVFD wants to help your Pod prepare, with community meetings and info posted on our web site. For starters, re-read FRVFD's "Emergency Information," mailed to you earlier, and downloadable at www.frvfd.org.

- Elect a **Pod coordinator** (the position can rotate). The Pod coordinator attends occasional meetings with the FRVFD disaster prep team, and brings information back to the Pod (anyone can come, but one person commits to making it "for sure"). S/he also keeps the inventory info, a backup of phone-tree list, tracks goal progress, and reminds people of meetings.

- Consider setting a few **goals** for yourselves, with deadlines.

- Make a commitment to **check on each other** after a "slow" disaster such as quake or storm.

- Know the potential **hazards** in your Pod area: Power lines? Road likely to slide? Fuel stores?

- Consult with the VFD to decide where the best "last-resort" fire **evacuation site** might be within your Pod area, or nearby: a relatively safe house or a mowed clearing far from trees. Rehearse evacuation options.

- **Animal** owners: provide for your critters' emergency needs. Podsters: if your neighbors are FRVFD first responders, plan to help their animals while they're fighting the disaster for you.

- Ambitious Pods might want to **educate** themselves more on disaster preparedness, from retrofitting your house to first aid training. Look at www.frvfd.org for resources.

3) *Work out communications.*

- Organize your branch of the **phone tree**. Exchange phone numbers and other contact information; make a master list.

Sample Goals for Pods

... we eavesdrop on one Pod's progress...

a) All of our households will have disaster supplies in place (home and car) by Oct. 31. Harry will organize bulk orders at Caz Store.

b) We'll pitch in together to buy a CB radio and scanner, to live at Jo's house.

c) We commit to staying connected to the FRVFD network via the phone tree, coordinator, and liaison.

d) Jo, Sally, and Uncle Billy Bob will get first aid training.

e) We'll do an evacuation drill next Sunday!

- Elect a **phone-tree liaison** (and a backup). The liasons will connect with phone tree coordinators in your immediate area; coordinators will be in direct contact with FRVFD.

- Decide on **backup communications** if the phones are out. We strongly suggest that every Pod have among its members at least one CB radio or mobile radio, and also an emergency scanner. We also suggest a color-coded flag system for each house: red for “we need help,” green for “we’re okay.” (The flags can be thriftstore t-shirts or something easy like painted rocks.)

4) Encourage every household to stock emergency supplies.

- Each and every household needs **emergency supplies**: food, first aid, meds, blankets, tools, etc. Complete lists will be posted at www.frvfd.org—print as handouts for your meeting. We suggest three months of supplies. If it’s The Big One, those of us who live in rural, sparsely populated areas are last in line for official help.

- Self-sufficiency is critical. So is an **ethic of sharing**. Even the best supply stash might go awry in an emergency. Imagine how easily it could be *you* or your loved ones in need. Let’s all agree to help each other as best we can.