

King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts ***Disasters: Are you ready?***

Public-Private Partnerships

The term “public-private partnerships” is used much more frequently these days. I’d like to share my perspective on our long term emergency management partnership with Puget Sound Energy.

My first working relationship with Puget Power (what PSE) was called back then was around 1992. I worked for Washington State Emergency Management and we were just starting up a public education effort for the state. Puget came to the table and wanted to pay for the printing of disaster preparedness manuals for neighborhoods. These were thick books that provided information on how to organize your neighborhood into teams. It was a major endeavor for them, costing tens of thousands of dollars and one which they entered into gladly.

Since I moved to King County back in 1996, Puget Sound Energy has been a model for other private utilities and companies in general to follow. Examples of what they have done with us include:

- Puget has led the effort in bringing other electrical utilities to the table, both here in the Central Puget Sound and in the multi-state Northwest and British Columbia. I call them the glue that keeps other folks coming to the table and interacting.
- When we were concerned about the potential for electrical blackouts and brownouts they were the ones at the table to sit down with us and plan out how we could jointly respond. They have been key players in all the Blue Cascades Exercises and are leaders in how these exercises are designed.
- Safety is always a high priority for Puget Sound Energy and they host electrical and gas safety seminars for first responder and the general public. I learned a few tips from attending one of these seminars.
- In this same vein, they have made numerous appearances on my Project Impact Show. Sponsoring a show on gas and electric safety. One segment was specifically on how to set up and operate a generator safely.

- They were one of the first companies to sign onto the Regional Disaster Plan and have been an active participant at planning meetings throughout the planning process that is still continuing.
- When we did a half-page color ad in the Seattle Times promoting a disaster preparedness show, Puget Sound Energy was the first private company to come to the table to help sponsor the ad, which was expensive.
- Puget Power has a seat on the King County Emergency Management Advisory Committee and regularly attend and contribute to this body's work products.
- Puget Sound Energy also literally, has a seat, and a computer in our Emergency Coordination Center. During the past windstorm they staffed that throughout the event, beginning the night the wind blew.
- They also had corporate volunteers helping out the Red Cross and other community shelter operations by moving supplies and equipment.

I remember several years ago being asked to attend what I'll call a "get ready for the storm season" meeting that Puget Sound Energy held with their operations people and other partners like, King County and the National Weather Service. They have definitely been doing due diligence in being corporately prepared for disasters.

The face of Puget Sound Energy for most of this work has been Mary Robinson and her small team. A real professional who via relationship building is making for a more secure present and a safer tomorrow.

No, Puget Sound Energy isn't perfect, but if every private utility and company was as active in their community and prepared for disasters, and supportive of regional activities as they are—then we'd be a whole lot better off and I'd have more hope for our collective future.