

Ready to Respond: Godfrey becomes second community in Illinois to receive preparedness recognition

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - The **Village of Godfrey** is prepared for every sort of disaster, from the usual worries of tornadoes and flooding to the outlandish fears of supervolcanoes and a zombie apocalypse.

Because of the amount of work and training the village has done to prepare for the worst over the last two years, Godfrey has been selected to receive the "**Ready to Respond Community**" Award from the **Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA)**. The village is set to receive the award on Oct. 18. This award has only been given to one other community in the state - **Charleston**. It will be the first in the Riverbend Area to receive this distinction.

" is recognized across the country as a leader in emergency management, and this program has very rigorous criteria we had to meet," **Godfrey Fire Chief and Emergency Services and Disaster Agency (ESDA) Director Erik Kambarian** said. "This is not something we wrote a letter to an agency to receive qualifications. We had to send documentation and back up what we were saying. There is a reason we are only the second community to reach this, because by no means is it easy."

Kambarian spearheaded the initiative with Godfrey ESDA Deputy Director, **Chris Sichra**. Sichra is a full-time firefighter for the **St. Louis City Fire Department** as well. Sichra coordinated an **Emergency Operation Plan (EOP)** with agencies operating within the village government as well as outside municipalities, **Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC)** and other volunteer groups such as the **Red Cross** and the **Salvation Army**.

"This project started about two years ago," Sichra said. "Godfrey was working for an that was a federally compliant plan local governments use to map out roles, responsibilities and titles during a disaster. It helps cooperation between agencies."

Cooperation is bolstered through a common language and radio frequency used in case of disasters. The plan also outlines the roles people will play during a disaster. Those roles will include law enforcement, fire protection and emergency medical personnel as well as elected officials. Sichra said he ensured village officials, including **Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick** took several training courses for their roles in an emergency.

"It allows us to cross-train people to shift gears into disaster mode," he said.

Those roles occur in disaster mode to ensure the village's emergency command center is operated by people familiar with the systems. Sichra said the village's staff is usually low due to a lack of need and a cost savings. By training the village's current staff in emergency roles, Sichra said the village will not need much outside assistance in the event of a worst case scenario.

To test this scenario, Sichra said he worked with **Madison County** in a sequence of scenarios. One of which was a tabletop test, and the other was a multi-agency live action

drill. Both drills included one of Godfrey's most common natural disaster dangers - a tornado.

"We were able to test our plan last year," Sichra said. "We did tabletop training with the county. We simulated blocked roadways needing to be cleared for accessibility. We also did barricades for downed power lines. The village is backing up that symphony with additional services to help everything work more efficiently."

A larger-scale drill was held last March to simulate damage assessment following a tornado. Sichra, who is a HAM radio operator, was able to send a team of damage assessors with a HAM operator to various sites across Godfrey. Those sites were blocked by debris in the simulation. That debris was cleared by the time assessors reached the sites.

"It was really successful," Sichra said. "We had a **Metro Air Assessment** helicopter from the **St. Louis County Police Department**. The **Illinois State Police** also had an emergency trailer. We got really high marks on how we performed, it was a learning experience. We learned about new technologies, and some of the challenges they have."

To receive the Ready to Respond accreditation, Sichra said he and Kambarian had more than 200 courses to complete. He said elected officials had as many as 20 each as well. The village also created a volunteer outreach program, established resource sharing with LCCC, **Jerseyville** and **Brighton** and created a resident guide for emergency management, which can be found online.

Sichra said the plan would be effective for everything from floods and tornadoes to nuclear meltdowns and zombie apocalypses. In fact, Sichra has experience with nuclear weapons during his time in the Army, and Chief Kambarian is the Madison County nuclear response expert. Kambarian will be traveling to Chernobyl in November for training.

While things such as nuclear meltdowns may be highly unlikely, Mayor McCormick said he was happy the village had a plan for weather emergencies, such as the flooding experienced last December by residents living near **Clifton Terrace** and **Whitford Place**.

"I live here, and I just want to help make Godfrey a better place," he said. "I give Chris Sichra a tremendous pat on the back for all the work he's done for this."