

## Frequently Asked Questions about a LEPC By: Laura Thiesen

A Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is a much needed asset in any community. When an emergency or disaster strikes a community, it is imperative that there be a plan in place for agencies to work together to address the needs of the community. Perhaps you have questions about the role of an LEPC in your community and how you might become involved.

**Is it a disaster or an emergency?** A disaster is a sudden event, such as an accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life. An emergency is a situation that poses an immediate risk to health, life, property, or environment. Most emergencies require urgent intervention to prevent a worsening of the situation. In our community, we have limited resources and an emergency could easily become a disaster.

**What is an LEPC?** An LEPC is a gathering of representatives in your community that have an interest in preventing and planning for an emergency or a disaster. The LEPC is a product of federal legislation passed in the wake of the 1984 Bhopal disaster in India, where thousands of people died due to an accident involving hazardous chemicals. They were developed to ensure the public has the *right to know* about hazardous and toxic chemicals in their communities. The LEPC is also responsible for putting together a strategic plan for dealing with catastrophic events and emergencies in the community.

**What are the hazardous and toxic chemicals in the Copper Basin?** The primary hazardous chemicals in our community are crude oil and petroleum products (diesel fuel, heating fuel, and propane). There is also the potential for spills from hazardous materials (formaldehyde, sulfuric acid, chlorine, acetylene, nitrogen, and argon and argon carbon dioxide gas) being transported through our area. See this article for more information: [http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/perp/plans/uc/Annex%20L%20\(Jan%2010\).pdf](http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/perp/plans/uc/Annex%20L%20(Jan%2010).pdf).

**What is the role of the LEPC?** The role of the LEPC is to form a partnership with local agencies and state and tribal government entities to prevent, prepare for, respond, and recover from disasters such as fire, flood, earthquake, and/or hazardous material spills. It is important to note that the LEPC does not play a role during an emergency or a disaster, rather to prevent and prepare for the event.

**Who is involved in the LEPC?** Any person with interest in the community can be involved in the LEPC. Members should include fire departments, law enforcement, emergency responders, healthcare workers, media, schools, transportation and government agencies. We also encourage involvement from those who work with the infrastructure (financial institutions, electricity and power, sanitation, and communications). Finally, church leaders, store managers, contractors, and local citizens are invited and encouraged to participate on the committee.

Currently the LEPC is chaired by Laura Thiesen. The other officers are Joel Medendorp, Jason Hoke, Vanessa Goodlataw and Tana Mae Pete. The coordinator is Libby Bengtson.

**What does the LEPC do?** The LEPC meets monthly to review the community response plan and address hazards and discuss ways to keep the public informed about the LEPC. We also exercise and train for these emergencies.

**Where is the Emergency Response Plan located?** In Glennallen, the emergency response plan is housed in several locations. Should you wish to review it, a copy is available at the Glennallen Trooper Post, Cross Road Medical Center, Copper River EMS, Copper River School District, GlennRich Fire Department, and with the LEPC.

**How do I become involved in our LEPC?** Meetings are held at 10:00am on the second Thursday of each month at Prince William Sound Community College. The meeting last one hour. Any interested party is welcome to attend. Should you have any questions, you may call Libby or Laura at 822-3203.

**Please consider your role for when an emergency happens in the Copper Basin. Whether a private citizen or a professional in any capacity, your LEPC needs you and invites you to become involved.**