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Hemphill: Why you must protect yourself

By Alan Hemphill

January 30, 2008

Let me put this succinctly: You are responsible for your own personal and property protection.

If you don't believe the personal part, talk to a local police officer and ask if the police can give you a protection squad if you are threatened.

Once when threatened, I called the police and was told, "Mr. Hemphill, we do not provide protection, we provide retribution. Rest assured if you are killed, the judicial system is likely to punish the culprit."

A lot of good that did me. I got a Concealed Weapon Carry Permit and provided my own protection.

Similarly, if you think your "fire protection district" provides protection, let me disabuse you of that notion. What your local fire station will do is try to keep the existing fire from engulfing other nearby structures.

The firefighters want to stop your fire, but by the time they get there, the chances are slim unless you live right around the corner from a fire station.

I hate to even include numbers in a column, because most readers' eyes glaze over, but let me put a few pertinent facts before you.

It is all about "response time." In my fire district, near Escondido, a Ph.D. engineer friend of mine recently ran the numbers for hundreds of responses. The actual speed of the medical and firefighting equipment in answering calls over a five-month period was 23 mph.

(It should be noted that the fire department's mark their "response time" from the time the wheels roll until they stop. The time a spouse takes to find a victim, call 911, get an operator, get the medics and firefighters on the trucks, and the time from the curb to the victim, does not count in their measurement.)

The national "response time" for cardiac arrest is supposed to be four minutes or less — and cardiac arrest is by far the most dangerous of the usual responses by fire departments. In my area, more than 85 percent of responses are for medical calls, not for fires.

In my district, the actual response time by fire/medical officials is more than nine minutes. I suggest you go to your local fire station and drive to your home at 23 mph, the average fire equipment speed in my district. You probably don't have a Ph.D. engineer friend willing to do the analysis for you. The raw data is public knowledge, but few people bother to analyze hundreds of runs over a few months.

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I am active in the Fire Safe group in my area, and I recommend you do the same. Self protection can range from an automatic external defibrillator for heart attacks until the paramedics arrive (simple, and less than \$1,500) to various gels and pumps for the next time we have a firestorm. (These can cost as little as \$1,500 to more than \$20,000 for a fully automated system.) Only you know the medical condition of your family, and the risk factors of your home, and the health of your pocketbook.

You must protect yourself.

Reach Hemphill at ahemphill@cox.net.

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