

Red Cross, San Jose Fire Department, community partner volunteers install almost 270 smoke alarms in recent activity

By Larry Dietz

Over 115 volunteers from the American Red Cross Silicon Valley Chapter and volunteer teams from corporate and community partners — including Tzu Chi Foundation, Palo Alto Networks, Rotary, PacificWide, Team Red White and Blue, and Intel — met on Saturday, July 20, at the Community Recreation Room of the Eastridge Estates Community in



San Jose for a “Sound the Alarm” home fire safety and smoke alarm installation event. Thanks to a grant from the San Jose Department, carbon monoxide detectors were also installed.

The San Jose Fire Department, a key partner for this event, was on hand to provide their support and fire safety experience. Fire Chief Robert Sapien Jr. offered introductory remarks on the importance of the Sound the Alarm event. He described how this work is especially crucial for mobile home residents because these dwellings generally lack fire-resistant materials and alternative ingress/egress routes, greatly increasing the importance of early warnings that smoke alarms provide.

Almost 270 free smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors were installed, making 309 residents safer in 76 of the 185 homes in the community.

Noah’s Bagels was kind enough to donate breakfast, and Lee’s Sandwiches generously donated lunch for the teams.

Initial training was provided by Red Cross leadership volunteers Terry Unter and Doug Moses-Batson.

The volunteers were divided into teams that would install smoke alarms and provide training to residents. Each team was composed of an Educator, an Installer, an Installer Assistant, and a Documenter.

The team Educator helped families create an escape plan and learn about local safety hazards such as earthquakes and how to be prepared for them. Each team also had an installer and assistant responsible for the actual installation, an educator who provided training about the alarms, fire and earthquake safety and the importance of escape routes, and a documenter who recorded the number of alarms installed and demographics of the family rounded out the team.

The event was a great success, helping to service 41 percent of the residences within the community.

Avneet Dhanota of Palo Alto Networks said, “I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from helping others. Here, I know that what I do may save a life.”

The Red Cross responds to nearly 64,000 disasters a year, the majority of which are home fires. Working smoke alarms in a home cut the risk of death by half. Having an escape plan further improves the odds of survival. The Red Cross wants to end these tragedies and save lives, which is the goal of the Home Fire Campaign launched in 2014. Year-round through the campaign’s Sound the Alarm events, Red Cross volunteers and community partners go door-to-door in high-risk neighborhoods to install free smoke alarms and help families create home fire escape plans.

About the author: Larry Dietz is a Colonel (Retired), U.S. Army Reserve, as well as a dedicated Red Cross public affairs volunteer in the Silicon Valley Chapter.