



# are you ready?

**grey matters by** Ruth Gerzon

**Disaster will strike again, though whether that will happen this year or in 2025 or any other random date, none of us know.**

Most Kiwis would agree that our small country has had more than its fair share of natural disasters. But fairness doesn't come into this equation. In this uncertain world, as we learn more about earthquake fault lines, tsunamis, floods and climate change, deep down most of us know that disaster is likely to strike again in our lifetimes.

So why don't we get prepared? A quick survey of some Eastern Bay Villages members shows that less than one in 10 households have a full emergency kit and plan. My own pantry houses only a few tins of food and a store of bottled water. The latter is in case our farm water supply fails, an emergency we experience only too often.

Such is the gap between the reality of impending disaster and our will to prepare for it. High on my New Year's resolution list was to take action, so I sought advice from Meagan Edhouse, an emergency management adviser at Whakatane District Council.

The good news is that even though we might be slack, our council takes disaster preparedness seriously. Meagan shared some excellent resources, including a special booklet for people with disabilities.

She also emphasised that we can't just rely on Civil Defence to help us when things go pear shaped. The authorities may not reach us for two or three days, or longer, and electricity, water, wastewater and landlines may not be working.

However good our kit, the reality is that many of us will need help from our neighbours if we are to survive traumatic events. This is especially true for people who can't hear alarms or who can't run for the hills due to visual impairment or physical disability.

Armed with this information I was still reluctant to take sensible precautions. Not knowing the date of the forthcoming disaster, something else always takes precedence in my busy life. If I knew it was scheduled for next week I'd be buying the requisite supplies this morning instead of writing this column.

So I figure this is a bit like other New Year resolutions. It's best to have others involved, to keep me honest and focused. Who better to support me in this endeavour than my neighbours? When the going gets tough they are the most likely to be around and accessible.

So I approached two neighbouring households on our rural road, one long resident, one newly arrived, and invited them to join me in disaster planning.



## A fortnightly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.

We had some fascinating discussions on where it was safe to go in an earthquake, how far the tsunami might travel up our Ohiwa inlet and how we can easily be cut off from both Opotiki and Ohope through floods.

The real difficulty will be if disaster strikes when we are away from home and access is difficult, especially for our neighbours with a child in preschool. We plan more discussions over the coming weeks as we work through some of these issues. Then we will invite other neighbours and share ideas.

This is where the expertise of Neighbourhood Support comes in handy. You may remember Neighbourhood Watch, which was established in the 1970s by the police as a crime prevention initiative. It always sounded a bit creepy. Neighbourhood Support is now a stand-alone nationwide organisation with a holistic approach to community safety and awareness. They partner with the police,

Civil Defence, Fire and Emergency and many others.

Team leader Louise Milton, along with area co-ordinators Shelley Steele and Val Robertshaw, work to make our homes, streets and communities safer, more caring places to live.

There are currently 211 active Neighbourhood Support groups in the Eastern Bay, each of 10-to-12 households. This number is steadily growing but there is still much work to be done. If my calculations are correct, there are more than 9000 households not yet in a group.

March is a good month for getting to know your neighbours. It's the 10th anniversary of Neighbours' Day so organisers of this national initiative ([www.neighboursday.org.nz](http://www.neighboursday.org.nz)) have gifted us not just one but 10 days in which to connect with those nearest to our home. The dates are March 22-31, so we need to start planning get togethers such as barbecues soon.

To facilitate your planning, Meagan Edhouse along with Louise Milton and her team, will share their knowledge and resources at a public meeting at Knox Presbyterian Church on Tuesday, March 12. The meeting is from 10am to 11.30am. All are welcome.

In my youth we sang along to the Beatles: "Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends". It's those friends and neighbours who will see us through when disaster comes our way. It's a good idea to get to know them now.