

Woodland schools are ready for anything

Alice Perry Linker
staff reporter

If an emergency happens at a Woodland school, police and fire departments can go immediately to a secure online server to find maps and other information that tells them exactly where exits, fire extinguishers, hazardous materials and other dangerous items are located.

The Woodland School District is the first Washington state school district to complete a full analysis and mapping of school buildings under the Rapid Responder School Mapping Program, said Keith Merritt, coordinator of the Cowlitz County Safe Schools Coalition.

Information about each Woodland school has been put on an Internet server that can be accessed only by police and fire departments, he said. Armed with information ahead of time,

the first responders are better prepared to meet whatever school emergencies arise.

In 2002, the Legislature enacted the law that provides funding for schools to complete the rapid responder program, as well as implement training for each principal. All Washington public school districts with kindergarten through 12th grade are required to complete the program, Merritt said.

"The program contains 750 points of data, such as evacuation routes, location of shut-off valves—everything you can imagine is on it," he said.

The Cowlitz Safe Schools Coalition is working with all Cowlitz County public schools to establish the information programs, he said.

"All of the schools are compliant at some level," Merritt said. "Woodland is the first district to become 100 percent

compliant."

Clark County schools are also working to implement the rapid responder program, and both Clark and Cowlitz county districts have made great strides, he said.

"The recognition comes at a good time in light of the tough incidents Woodland has dealt with lately," Merritt said. "Hats off to the Woodland School District."

Once implemented, the rapid responder program must be updated annually by each district using funds allocated by the Legislature, he said.

The Woodland information was gathered and distributed by Kathy Griffin, the district's community liaison coordinator, and Tegan Steen, assistant to Superintendent Michael Green.

"It was two years' work," Griffin said. "It was a ton of work."