

First batch of NGC's CERT volunteers graduate with flair

As NGC's Community Awareness and Emergency Response (CAER) Programme was rolled out, residents of NGC's fenceline communities greeted the newest opportunity to assure their continued safety, build relationships, and exchange pertinent information with the Company.

For the first leg of the programme, NGC has targeted high-priority communities, that is, those closest to its larger natural gas installations. The primary aim of CAER is to educate residents on the risks involved in living near a natural gas pipeline, and to offer solutions for reducing these risks.

One of the key strategies of CAER is to train volunteers to guide their community in the event of an emergency of any kind, be it natural gas related, or a far more likely hurricane, earthquake or flood.

NGC has therefore initiated a Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) programme, in which volunteers participate in a 5-week exercise led by Trinidad & Tobago Voluntary Emergency Response Trainers (TTVERT).

The chief instructor is Mr. John Sylvester, Chairman of TTVERT and Head of the Department of Security Administration and Emergency Management at Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies. Mr. Sylvester is also a member of the T&T Fire Services Auxiliary Unit, and a former policeman and fire officer, and is thus uniquely qualified to lead the programme.

The first batch of 24 trainees hailed from Poole Valley, Rio Claro; St. John's, Brother's Road; Clarke Road, Penal; and Avocat, Fyzabad. The course was comprised of 5 one-day sessions, held on Saturdays in October and November. Modules included Disaster Preparedness, Fire Safety, Disaster Medical Operations, Light Search and Rescue Operations, CERT Organisation and Disaster Psychology.

The course came to a close on November 14th with an emergency drill at NGC's Head Office in Point Lisas. The drill took the form of a simulated emergency in which a strong odour caused panic and nausea in a small community.

TTVERT trainers looked on and critiqued the performance of the graduates, who did as they were taught and evaluated the situation, set up an incident command post, performed triage, evacuated the injured, and applied First Aid.

The exercise was made more realistic with the arrival of frantic relatives and persistent media. Responders also called out and liaised with NGC personnel to assess the source of the odour, which turned out to be chemicals dumped in a drain by a manufacturer.

Upon stand-down of the drill, the exercise was positively evaluated by TTVERT members. Certificates of Participation were then presented to graduates, who expressed their gratitude to NGC for equipping them with the knowledge to serve their communities in times of crisis.

They will receive follow-up training in First Aid and Fire-fighting early in 2010. NGC will also host another CERT session for other selected communities in September-October next year.

NGC's CAER programme has proven to be an invaluable way to build relationships with communities in order to allay their safety concerns in an atmosphere of mutual trust and support.