

Smartphones and Emergencies

By Tina Nerat

Every Oakmont resident should have a smartphone. They are a lifeline in an emergency. Every year, Oakmont faces emergency situations: fires, evacuations, public safety power shutoffs (PSPS), poor air quality from fires in other regions, and always the possibility of an earthquake.

Smartphones provide capabilities beyond phone calls and text messaging. Smartphones are defined by Oxford Languages as “a mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touchscreen interface, Internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications”. Smartphone applications (apps) and Internet access give Oakmont residents access to information to be aware and stay safe. Flip-phones and Jitterbugs are NOT smartphones.

Besides being able to make phone calls, send texts, and take photos/videos, smartphones provide quick access to Nixle alerts, PG&E outage/restoration information, air quality maps, fire/wind maps, fire/police department alerts, Calfire updates, Sonoma County alerts, and access to information on the Internet. During stressful emergencies, having access to information can help make better decisions. An additional bonus is that smartphones give access to the Internet when power is turned off during a PSPS.

There are two categories of smartphones: iPhones from Apple and Android phones from a multitude of manufacturers: Samsung, Motorola, LG, and Google, to name a few. They vary in price but have similar functionality. Along with a smartphone, a cellular “data” plan is required. There are many vendors, and service quality/pricing varies widely. In Oakmont, location is key: cellular reception varies depending upon the terrain and being within range of cell towers.

For those new to smartphones, the California Telephone Access Program (CTAP) offers their basic Android and iPhone training via online Zoom sessions. Oakmont residents can take advantage of these excellent FREE classes by contacting CTAP at: 866-271-1540 or e-mail smartphonetraining@ddtp.org

Oakmont Technology Learning Center (OTLC) can provide smartphone buying advice and factors to consider by going to <https://www.oakmont-learning.org/contact.html> and filling out the contact form. Future columns in Oakmont News will provide more information as well.