

How to Fill a Sandbag

You're thinking this is pretty simple, right? Not so simple after all.

With 225 TONS of sand on its way along with 10,000 empty bags, who was going to fill them? This once-in-a-hundred years flood was obviously an emergency, a surprise no one saw coming. We needed both a location and equipment, and equally important, we needed to corral a lot of volunteers.

Rodger and Toni Edmonds volunteered the use of their business location, T&S Supply in downtown Russell. This was a logical choice because Newport Township houses its trucks and tractors there and that area was also flood central for many homes.

Rodger, our Township Highway Commissioner, put out the first word for volunteers along with Facebook posts and emails from Township Supervisor Randy Whitmore. Together with Wadsworth Administrator Moses Amidei, I cranked out a special edition of the village newsletter also requesting help. These combined efforts garnered the volunteers noted elsewhere in this newsletter, an impressive group of hardworking people.

Next, a "filing station" of sorts was needed, some kind of apparatus to facilitate loading sand into the bags. With quick thinking, three components were needed to assemble this makeshift piece of equipment: two folding A-frame type signs, an extension ladder, and several of those orange cones you see during road construction.

The A-frames were opened and spaced about six feet apart and the extension ladder placed on top. Using a sharp knife, about six inches of the top part of a cone was cut off. The modified cone was then inserted upside down into a space between two rungs. The bottom plate of the cone held it in place preventing it from falling through. A perfect emergency design! The length of the ladder allowed for four cones, thus creating a four-unit sandbagging station.

To fill a bag, one person held an open bag underneath the cone while another volunteer filled it with about four shovel loads of sand. The filled bag was then dragged aside for a third worker to tie, allowing that second worker to immediately place another bag under the cone to keep the assembly line process running efficiently.



Other workers then loaded the tied bags onto skids, into buckets of front-end loaders, or into the beds of different trucks, preparing for delivery to various flood locations.

A filled sand bag weighs from 40 to 45 pounds, depending on how much sand was shoveled into it as well as how wet the sand might have been... pretty heavy lifting for volunteers who come in all different sizes, strengths, and physical conditioning.

Make no mistake about it, this was hard work. Squatting, bending, shoveling, lifting, carrying, and moving bags. But rarely was any complaining heard... the volunteers worked hard because they knew their efforts would save someone's house and the precious belongings and memories in it.

I was proud of these volunteers.