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"Be Smart, Take Part, Prepare" in Warren Township

TAP into Warren Staff

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WARREN, NJ - September is National Preparedness Month (www.ready.gov/september), which aims to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to all types of emergencies. This year's theme, "Be Disaster Aware, Take Action to Prepare," encourages people to be aware of the disasters that may occur in their area and then take action to be better prepared.

In Somerset County, the theme is, 'Be Smart, Take Part, Prepare' for Hurricanes, Other Disasters.

During an emergency, it's easy to feel out of control. The best way to be in control is to prepare for the unexpected to the best of your ability.

In an emergency, where would you meet your family members outside your home? What medications would you need for your family and pets? Where would you look for information about the emergency? Who would assist family members and friends who may be vulnerable due to age or illness if you are not available?

Since September is National Preparedness Month (NPM), it's a good time to talk with your family and plan what you would need should you have to leave your home or stay in place due to a hurricane or another disaster. During the first three days of an emergency, it is essential that you plan how you will survive until organized rescue efforts can be mobilized.

The goal of NPM is to encourage Americans to take steps to prepare for emergencies throughout the year. In New Jersey, hurricane season runs through November so preparedness is essential.

“This year’s campaign titled “Be Smart, Take Part, Prepare” is a call to action to residents to think ahead and look beyond batteries and flashlights when making emergency preparedness plans,” said Freeholder Deputy Director Mark Caliguire, public health and safety department liaison.

“Preparation should include purchasing non-perishable food items, planning ways to feed your family should you lose power and making sure that you have necessary medications for your entire family, including your pets,” he said.

“Since predicting when and where a disaster will hit can be difficult to pinpoint, it’s important to be prepared with a plan and an emergency supplies kit,” said Freeholder Caliguire. “Being prepared can make a significant difference in your health, safety and comfort during the first few days of a disaster.”

Locally, National Preparedness Month is being promoted by the Somerset County Public Health & Safety Department, which includes the Department of Health and Office of Emergency Management.

Understanding basic food guidelines, particularly if power outages and flooding occur, is essential during an emergency. If there is a boil-water advisory in your area, be sure to pay attention to instructions. Having a plan in place will ensure proper nutrition, energy to take care of yourself and your family, and long-term wellness.

During an emergency you can provide healthy and delicious meals for your family by following a few basic tips for stocking your pantry and planning emergency menus:

- Know safe storage temperatures for perishable food. If the power goes out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. If unopened, a refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A freezer will maintain its temperature for about 48 hours if it's full, and 24 hours if it's half full. Having a refrigerator and freezer thermometer will ensure that temperatures are safe.
- Stock up on condiments such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce and barbeque sauce (low- sodium and low-sugar varieties are better choices). These items have a long shelf life and are versatile in making foods taste better. Make sure your pantry has canned products that provide protein, such as chicken, salmon, beans and peanut butter. It’s also important to have a manual can opener on hand.
- Purchase boxes of powdered milk or shelf-stable cartons of milk that can be used for cereal and desserts. Dried fruits, nuts and spices are easy to store and can add a dash of flavor to otherwise bland dishes during an emergency.

Invitations were extended to Somerset County businesses, educational institutions, day care/preschools, faith-based and community organizations to participate in the NPM effort by setting up table displays of items needed in an emergency supplies kit. Participating groups received free resources, such as emergency-supply checklists and pocket-sized booklets in English and Spanish. Also, a poster from the Somerset County Health Department to aid in promoting National Preparedness Month was provided.

To date, the following Somerset County organizations will have displays with resources for the public to take: Visiting Nurses Association of Somerset Hills, William Annin Middle School and RiteAid in Basking Ridge; Clarence Dillon Public Library and Dr. Allyson Agathis, pediatrician/adolescent medicine specialist in Bedminster; Raritan Valley Community College Student Government Association in Branchburg; The Preschool Place & Kindergarten at Temple Shalom and Catholic Charities Diocese of Metuchen in Bridgewater; Hillsborough Township School District and Raritan Valley Composite Squadron of the New Jersey Wing of the USAF Civil Air Patrol in Hillsborough; Manville Public Library and Manville Senior Center; North Plainfield Public Library; Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Somerset in Somerville; Citigroup Children's Center and Chubb & Son, Division of Federal Insurance Company, in Warren.

Check your local stores and businesses to see if they also are participating. The displays will make knowing what to purchase easier.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) leads this annual effort through its Ready Campaign, in partnership with Citizen Corps and the Ad Council. Residents are encouraged to visit www.ready.gov for information on how to plan for emergencies or to view a video at <http://bit.ly/DisasterPreparing>.

Also, the New Jersey Department of Health offers emergency-preparation resources at www.state.nj.us/health/er.

For more information about National Preparedness Month or to request resources, contact Sumantha Banerjee, public health emergency notifications systems coordinator, at 908-231-7155 or banerjee@co.somerset.nj.us. For more information about emergency preparedness, visit the Somerset County Emergency Preparedness webpage at www.co.somerset.nj.us/_ongoing/emergency_preparedness.html.

In Warren, the Office of Emergency Management Coordinator is Jane Asch.

Asch says, "After our experiences with major storms causing extended power outages for many, we have learned that disasters do and will happen here. How prepared are you for another event? Now is the time to prepare for a disaster, and the most important part of preparedness is to have a Family Disaster PLAN. Your plan should definitely include what your family and you will do if you lose electricity for a week or more. If your home is supplied by well water, have a plan for a place to go or consider buying a generator. Below is a quick reference list of essential needs to assemble a Disaster Plan."

Disaster Supply Kit (update every six months)

Water (one gallon of water per person per day)

Food (a three day supply of non perishable food per person)

First Aid Kit

Tools and Supplies (such as flashlight, batteries, battery powered radio)

Clothing and Bedding (one change of clothing per person, one blanket per person)

Special items (medications, eyeglasses, baby items, important family documents, extra set of keys, credit card, cash)

Pet care items

If you are or if you know of an individual with special needs who would have difficulty in meeting those needs during an emergency, sign up for Register Ready, a free confidential NJ online database that identifies residents with special needs in order for emergency responders to know who they are, what the needs are, and where they reside. Register Online or contact the Township Clerk for a paper form. You may also call 2-1-1 to register by phone. Asch can be reached at (908) 753-8000 Ex 262 or jasch@warrennj.org.

Want to know how to be more self sustaining and knowledgeable about what to do during an emergency? Join the Warren Township Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) by taking the CERT course next time it is offered. The CERT course will train you in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT is an all-hazard, all-risk training program designed to teach you how to protect yourself, your family, your neighbors and community during a disaster situation. If you are interested in taking the course when it is next offered, email your name and contact information to jane.k.asch@gmail.com

America's PrepareAthon! was launched as a community-based campaign to increase emergency preparedness at the grassroots level by motivating the public to take action through such steps as drills, group discussions and exercises. On April 30, 2014 more than 5 million individuals participated in preparedness activities across the Nation as part of the first America's PrepareAthon! The second America's PrepareAthon! Community Day of Action will take place on September 30 and there are a variety of ways for communities to get involved.

Communities can begin planning their PrepareAthon! event by identifying the hazards that could happen in their area and developing their own activity to address those risks. At an individual or workplace level, this might include actions like making a communication plan or building an emergency supply kit. Communities can take action to prepare by coordinating with local emergency management agencies, first responders, fire, police, or public health departments to develop a community-wide drill. Many communities in earthquake-prone areas around the country will be participating in the Great Shakeout, a worldwide earthquake drill on October 16.

Once communities have identified a preparedness action, they can register their event on the America's PrepareAthon! website (www.ready.gov/prepare) and join millions of Americans who are doing their part to be more prepared.

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