

Make a Kit, Have a Plan, Get Prepared

Meet the Class of 2008: Fay, Hanna, Gustav, Ike, Josephine and Karina Tropical storms, such as these, have the potential to intensify, gain hurricane force and pack a mighty wallop.

Their predecessors, Rita and Katrina in 2005, Floyd in 1999 and Andrew in 1992, caused billions of dollars in property damage, displaced hundreds of thousands of people and claimed the lives of hundreds of victims.

September is National Preparedness Month.

"During this national awareness campaign, we are asking Essex County residents to prepare for unexpected emergencies by getting a kit, making a plan and staying informed," said Sheriff Armando Fontoura who is the Coordinator of the Essex County Office of Emergency Management.

New Jersey is not immune to the destructive forces of hurricanes and tropical storms. The last hurricane to have a major impact on New Jersey was Floyd on September 17, 1999.

By the time Floyd struck New Jersey it had been downgraded to a tropical storm. However, Floyd produced winds in excess of 60 miles per hour and unleashed torrential

rainfall across the state which caused severe flooding in many areas. Additionally, Floyd knocked out electrical power to more than 650,000 residents.

In Essex County, rising floodwaters, caused by Floyd, forced hundreds of Newark, Bloomfield, Fairfield and Belleville residents to be evacuated. In the hillier, western portion of Essex County, Floyd's heavy rains triggered mud slides, power outages and road closings.

As recently as last year, an April nor'easter severely impacted Essex County, forcing hundreds of Fairfield residents to be evacuated from their homes by boat. The flooding also caused power outages and knocked out the area's potable water pump station.

"While New Jersey is not hit as frequently as Florida and the Gulf states we are vulnerable to direct and indirect hits from hurricanes and tropical storms," cautioned Sheriff Fontoura. "Every family should have disaster supplies, food and a communications plan in tact in the event of such an emergency because it can happen here."

In addition to household preparedness, Sheriff Fontoura also urged local residents to volunteer their time, talent and energy through the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

"CERT members give vital support to First Responders during emergencies, provide immediate assistance to victims, organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site and collect disaster intelligence to support response efforts," Sheriff Fontoura noted.

"CERT members are trained in basic first aid, search and rescue techniques, fire suppression and other public safety disciplines."

Planning and preparation, however, are the critical steps to personal and family safety.

The following are quick tips for emergency preparedness.

A Disaster Supplies Kit should contain a three days' supply of canned, non-perishable food and three gallons of water per family member. Other supplies should include a battery-operated radio, a flashlight, extra batteries, one week's supply of prescription medicines, a first aid kit, personal toiletries, a non-electric can opener and utensils, cash or travelers' checks, important personal documents and special needs items, such as infant care supplies.

An emergency may require residents to evacuate the impacted area.

In case of an evacuation, motor vehicles should be filled with gasoline and each family member should have telephone contact information for relatives, work and school.

Additional information about a Disaster Supplies Kit can be accessed through the Essex County Sheriff's website at www.essexsheriff.com under Safety Tips of through the state's website at www.ready.nj.gov/plan/kit-plan.html.

Further information about the CERT program is available through your municipal emergency management coordinator or through New Jersey's website at www.state.nj/mjoem/emb_cert.html.