DEM NEWS

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Overview

Bryan Koon, Director

Florida’s 2011 Spring Season was remarkable in a number of ways. Though the usual array of flowers bloomed in some areas and tourists came to enjoy the beaches and theme parks, across the state, both drought and temperature records were broken and we are already dealing with one of the most active wildfire seasons in recent history.

Along with these wildfires, Florida may also be facing severe weather as forecasters are expecting hurricane activity to be above average this year. Currently, 12-18 named storms are forecast; 6-10 of those may become hurricanes, with 3-6 potentially major hurricanes. With such a forecast, it is imperative that you develop your family disaster plan. Encourage your entire family to participate. Other important preparations include your plans for family members with disabilities, business plans and your pet plan. To assist you with planning, the Division offers GetAPlan!, a website dedicated to helping you draft your disaster plan. We also offer a business planning tool, and an entire website dedicated to helping children understand and plan for disasters themselves. KidsGetAPlan offers a variety of options, such as games and online books, which help children as young as three better understand and be prepared for Hurricane Season.

As Florida hasn’t been severely impacted by hurricanes since 2005, many residents have become less vigilant in preparing for Hurricane Season. Rather than being complacent and ignoring the potential threats Hurricane Season can bring, invest time now to plan for what tomorrow may bring.

Did You Know?

Did you know a safe room is a room inside your home where you can seek shelter from potential disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes? Designed to offer extra protection against hurricanes and other disasters, safe rooms can be in a basement, bathroom, closet or other enclosed space on the ground floor that has other walls around it to help fortify the area. The simplest safe room is a closet with the hollow-core door replaced by an exterior-grade solid-core door. This door should have the longer hinge screws and strike-plate screws, as well as a dead-bolt to resist battering from winds and other forces. To make these rooms even stronger, they should be fortified with concrete and/or steel. The ceiling should also be reinforced. More expensive safe rooms have walls and a door reinforced with sheets of steel, Kevlar, or bullet-resistant fiberglass. Some safe rooms may also have externally-vented ventilation systems, a separate telephone connection and an escape shaft. Safe rooms are typically stocked with basic emergency and survival items such as flashlights, blankets, a first-aid kit, water and non-perishable food.

For more information, review FEMA’s safe room guidelines and instructions.

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During disasters, first responders must be prepared to react to anything. That means having redundant plans and capabilities, and testing those capabilities on a regular basis. During this year’s annual statewide hurricane exercise, the Florida National Guard and the State Emergency Response Team (SERT) operated out of the brand new Joint Operations Center Training Facility.

“We’ve spent hundreds and hundreds of hours preparing a realistic and challenging scenario,” said Bryan W. Koon, the Florida Division of Emergency Management’s Director. “This exercise allowed us to test our continuity of operations plan.”

The facility at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center is one of the locations for the SEOC’s Continuity of Operations if state officials have to evacuate their Tallahassee offices. Recently completed with federal funding, the building contains all of the tools and technology necessary for state officials to coordinate a disaster response. The building also serves as an alternate location for Florida National Guard operations if a disaster threatened St. Augustine. When not being used as a disaster center, the facility serves as a training facility for state and local agencies.

In May, emergency officials tested operations in this Center with the Hurricane Griffin training response, a training scenario based on a major hurricane hitting the Tampa area, moving across the state, and reemerging into the Gulf of Mexico before taking a northern turn, threatening the Tallahassee area. The scenario was designed to simulate the extreme limits of nature to ensure all of the state’s capabilities are tested.

“It makes us use all of our assets and think outside of the box to see where we’d get additional assets from,” said Col. William Beiswenger, director of the Florida National Guard’s Joint Directorate of Military Support.

Additional assets come in the form of assistance from Florida’s county emergency offices and other state agencies. The annual exercise also brings together responders from the local, state and national level so they can get to know each other before a real disaster occurs.

“We don’t wait until a disaster to meet our counterparts in other agencies,” said Beiswenger. “We bring personnel together to meet their counterparts so that when we do get into a disaster or emergency, we know who to work with for any need.”

During a disaster or emergency, representatives from all state agencies come together to form SERT, which manages the state’s response and acts as an intermediary between local authorities and federal officials. Maintaining constant and reliable communications immediately at all levels after a disaster is an important part of ensuring an effective response.

“Disaster response is a team effort,” Florida Governor Rick Scott said during a press conference to kick off the exercise. “Local response organizations play a key role in assisting Floridians in the response and recovery; therefore, planning and communication are essential to our team’s success.”

There were numerous activities during the week that kept the team busy. In addition to responding to the inputs from the scenario, emergency managers at Camp Blanding and across the state used this opportunity to test their equipment and update their emergency plans for the 2011 Hurricane Season.

Approximately half of the participants present for this year’s exercise were involved in responding to the 2004 hurricanes. This historical knowledge will play a vital role in bridging the gap for those who have come into emergency management in recent years when the state has not had a hurricane make landfall.

“It’s important to have everybody in the same room together,” said Koon. “That way, those who have not been involved with the process can understand what’s expected of them and how to function in the environment.”

The Florida National Guard has been called to respond to state disasters and emergencies 72 times since Hurricane Andrew devastated the state in 1992. This year, the Florida National Guard has approximately 8,000 personnel ready to mobilize in response to disasters.

View the 2011 Emergency Preparedness Exercise Video
Volunteer Florida
Wendy Spencer
CEO, Volunteer Florida

The Governor’s Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service (Volunteer Florida) focuses on three areas of service: administering federal and local funds for AmeriCorps programs, promoting volunteerism throughout Florida through trainings and technical support, and serving as the lead agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15 for volunteer and donations management in direct support of the State Emergency Response Team (SERT).

Volunteer Florida has been the lead role for ESF 15 since its inception in the mid-1990s after countless lessons learned from Hurricane Andrew’s impact on South Florida. In this role, Volunteer Florida manages and staffs the Florida Volunteer and Donations Hotline, supports local volunteer centers, and oversees the multi-agency donations warehouse.

Also, Volunteer Florida boasts a dedicated professional staff who provide training year-round for local ESF 15 agencies and their partners in the areas of volunteer and donations management for preparedness, response, long-term recovery and mitigation. The most widely requested training comes in the area of managing spontaneous volunteers for response and recovery.

To enhance preparedness for Florida’s communities, Volunteer Florida and the Division of Emergency Management are pleased to be working on a bold new disaster relief initiative. Taking a page out of how disaster relief organizations generally specialize in specific types of services and working with emergency managers to match needs with services, Volunteer Florida and DEM will encourage businesses, organizations, associations, and colleges to identify assets they have in four categories: products and goods, services, volunteers and financial contributions, which will be drawn upon when a disaster affects a region in Florida.

This initiative will allow SERT to have private sector assets readily available and will forge new relationships and regular communications with Florida’s corporate sector, which will encourage more businesses to prioritize preparedness activities such as COOP training and training for spontaneous volunteers. It will also promote the affiliation of volunteers from these businesses with disaster relief agencies, which will increase the number of trained and skilled volunteers in Florida who are able to effectively assist established relief organizations in times of a disaster. Volunteer Florida will be ramping up its training and technical assistance efforts to ensure that all Florida stakeholders are committed and ready if disaster strikes!

In addition to this new initiative and partnership with DEM, Volunteer Florida has been busy lending assistance to the Southeastern and Central United States that have been impacted by recent natural disasters, including the destructive tornadoes in Missouri and Alabama. Volunteer Florida staff has been sent to assist survivors in these regions. For more information, visit www.volunteerflorida.org.

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Volunteer Florida’s AmeriCorps members work with food banks to sort donations and help Floridians in need.

Insurance Analysis Helps Floridians Understand Their Policies

The Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.) provides information and analysis on insurance issues to help Floridians understand how their coverage works and what is covered under their insurance policies. Information is available for homes, rental units, vehicles, life and business policies.

Additionally, I.I.I. has white papers and background information related to catastrophes and insurance, flood insurance and facts, and statistics on hurricanes. These sources provide information related specifically to Florida hurricane deductibles, the importance of insuring to replacement value, and how insurance assessments impact the cost of a policy. Podcasts on topics such as How to File a Homeowners Insurance Claim and Understanding Trees and Insurance are also available. The podcasts can be downloaded to a PDA as needed.

Though supported by the insurance industry, I.I.I. is a nonprofit communications organization, dedicated to helping people understand their insurance and their options in coverage.

For more information, visit insuringflorida.org; FACEBOOK: Insuring-Florida; TWITTER: @InsuringFLA, or call (813) 480-6446.
Hurricane season started June 1 and forecasters are predicting a busy season with potentially 12-18 named storms, of which 6-10 may become a hurricane with 3-6 of those being a major hurricane. According to new climatology modeling, the probability of at least one hurricane striking Florida’s coast this year is 71 percent.

While no one can predict exactly what will happen during the six-month season, being prepared is a safety measure no one should take lightly or ignore.

“With a potentially high activity forecast for the 2011 Hurricane Season, it is important that all Floridians prepare their families, homes and businesses for what may come,” said Bryan W. Koon, DEM Director. “In a major disaster, emergency workers may not be able to reach everyone right away, and in some cases it may take three or more days for help to arrive. You need to have provisions for your home plan and a place to go to for the worst-case scenario.”

To help families prepare for hurricane season, the Division offers GETAPLAN!, an online service that provides important information for disaster supplies, contact listings for your county’s emergency responders, evacuation routes for your county, checklists for important steps to take throughout the process, and a variety of other options to help you prepare for potential disasters. KidsGetAPlan, a website for children, offers a variety of options such as stories and downloads to help them understand and prepare for disasters as well.

When putting together a disaster plan, an added bonus to consider is a bike for each member of the family. As roads may be impassable and gas stations closed, transportation may be minimal if at all. Needing only a narrow strip of vaguely smooth ground, a bike allows you a fair amount of travel after a disaster – unlike a car or even a truck – enabling you and your family to more readily travel to a friend’s house or the corner store. Child carriers are also available, and can be placed in front of or behind the main seat. There are also bike extensions that attach bike ends for younger children, as well as carts that can be used for children or supplies. Be sure to have bike helmets for each rider, even those in the carts.

Another useful item is a crank radio. Whether you are dealing with a power outage, natural disaster or just enjoying the great outdoors, wind-up radios are convenient because they don’t require an outlet. Not only is there a crank for generating power, but many of these radios come with alternative power options including a DC jack or solar panel to charge the unit. These devices are great for listening to the radio or receiving local weather alerts from NOAA, and many come with other uses such as a charger for your cell phone or other electronic devices. Look for the ones with short charge time, lengthy run time, diverse features, high durability and multiple charging options.

A nice addition for your food stock is boxed or canned milk. Pasteurized at an ultra high temperature (UHT), this special process and packaging makes them shelf-stable so they can sit unopened at room temperature for a year or more without spoiling. Depending on the brand, you can find a variety of sizes and flavors, such as strawberry, chocolate and vanilla. You also have a choice between whole milk, reduced fat and fat-free. Some brands have added vitamins, DHA, Omega-3, are made from certified organic milk or are not treated with rbST.

Preparing for disasters can seem a daunting task, but using the Division’s GETAPLAN! utility helps you easily draft a plan that suits your needs. Taking time now to do so will enable you to better handle whatever Mother Nature might have in store during this hurricane season.

**Hurricane Season - Are You Prepared?**

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**Supplies for your bike**

**Burly tires** - mountain bike tires are heavier than you need for almost any situation, so a good commuter tire is your best option.

**Patch kit** - in case you get a flat anyway. They are cheap and easy to use.

*Hurricane Season - Are You Prepared continued on page 7*
Healthy Food Choices For Your Hurricane Supply Kit

While hurricane disaster experts advise each household to put together a preparedness kit that includes such basics as flashlights, a radio, batteries, a first-aid kit, a manual can opener, medications, water and food, exactly what foods should be included is often overlooked.

The National Hurricane Center, the Red Cross, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Division all recommend healthy, easy-to-store food items, and note it is especially important to include diet-specific foods for family members who have high blood pressure, diabetes, gluten allergy (celiac disease), or other health condition that requires a special menu.

To start your food plan, create a hurricane healthy meals kit that includes essential nutrients from the five food groups. A balanced meal generally includes something from each group, though certain diets may limit or exclude certain foods from each section.

In an emergency, the top priority is maintaining your calorie level with healthy foods and staying hydrated. Your hurricane meals plan should provide at least three meals a day, spread out as evenly as possible, and include healthy snacks as needed between meals.

As shelf life is a major consideration for hurricane supply foods, storing foods that require little or no cooking, water or refrigeration is highly recommended. Canned foods and dry mixes will remain fresh for one to two years, but date all food items, and use and replace food before it loses freshness.

Fruits and vegetables have a high fiber and water content – important for maintaining digestive health – so be sure to have these foods on hand. There is a wide variety of packaged fruits available that can be included in your disaster food kit. Carefully read the labels to ensure the length of time for each product and verify diet concerns. Certain fresh fruits and vegetables are relatively long-lived and make excellent hurricane food supply choices. Apples, oranges, carrots and celery all last for several days even without refrigeration. Frozen fruits and vegetables will keep in the freezer for 24 to 48 hours after loss of electricity.

High-fiber, low-sugar cereals can be stored for a long time, and fortified cereals — those with added vitamins and nutrients — will help you and your family meet your daily nutritional requirements. Along with the cereal, stock canned or boxed milk which often have shelf lives of at least one year.

Energy bars and cereal bars offer a lot of healthy calories in a small package. You can also find a wide variety of these items that are vegan or have no gluten, and are packaged to last up to a year. For diabetics, there are also low glycemic index (GI) bars, which are available in a low-sugar (10 grams) version, and a little-to-no-sugar (0–1 gram) version.

Crackers are a good staple to have on hand as well, but choose a high-fiber, low-sodium option. Rice cakes are another nutritious choice and both are good eaten with nut butters.

Water is absolutely crucial when stocking your supplies. The Red Cross recommends one gallon of water per person per day, and the National Hurricane Center recommends storing enough for three to seven days. “Your water may not be in service after a disaster or it may be contaminated through damaged piping,” said Gwen Keenan, the Division’s Bureau Chief of Preparedness. “Don’t take the risk. Stock plenty of water for your family’s drinking and sanitation needs.”

If you lose power, perishable food in your freezer will be safe to eat for up to 24 hours if the freezer is half full, according to guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). If the freezer is full, food will last as long as 48 hours. Packing items close together in your refrigerator and freezer and keeping the doors closed as much as possible will help food stay cold longer.

Healthy Food Choices continued on page 7
Thawed frozen fruits should not be eaten if mold, a yeasty smell, or sliminess develops; thawed frozen vegetables can be kept at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower for a maximum of six hours, according to FoodSafety.gov, a web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The site also advises that fresh fruits and vegetables should be washed in clean water and dried before storing, as well as kept whole to increase the shelf-life.

To test your foods requiring refrigeration, include a food thermometer in your hurricane supplies kit. If certain foods reach a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours, they should not be eaten. “Don’t taste your food to determine its safety,” cautions Mike DeLorenzo, the Division’s Bureau Chief of Response. “Remember the adage, when in doubt, throw it out.”

The USDA has designated the following foods as safe to be used after reaching temperatures above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours: raw vegetables; fresh, dried, and canned fruits; fruit juices; hard cheeses (cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Parmesan, provolone, Romano, and grated Parmesan or Romano in a can or jar); breads and fruit pies; peanut butter and jelly; butter and margarine; olives and pickles; vinegar-based dressings; ketchup, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and soy, taco, barbecue, and hoisin sauces; and, herbs and spices. Use your own sense of caution with these items as well. While most raw vegetables or fruit will be fine after several hours or warm temperatures, cheeses, butter and margarine might not be.

Surprisingly, there are several cookbooks available to help you prepare and cook your food during hurricane season, among which are editions that offer recipes for diabetics; two such books are The Healthy Hurricane/Disaster Cookbook and the Hurricane Cookbook for Diabetics.

More guidelines on food safety are available on the In an Emergency page on FoodSafety.gov and on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service web site. Both sites offer printable charts that list the shelf life of commonly refrigerated foods.
The Division Receives The National 2011 Tom Lee State Award

The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) awarded the Division with the National 2011 Tom Lee State Award for Excellence in Floodplain Management. The award was presented May 19 at the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

“I am extremely proud of our state floodplain management team for their continued commitment to helping Florida’s communities reduce flood risk,” said Director Bryan W. Koon. “Our floodplain management staff often goes above and beyond to assist Florida’s residents, and it is an honor for our team to be recognized with this prestigious award.”

The ASFPM selected the Division of Emergency Management in acknowledgment of our outstanding efforts in the implementation of the Community Assistance Program Grant, which the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants to states participating in the National Flood Insurance Program. The grant is designed to provide technical assistance to communities to implement federal flood loss reduction policies and measures.

The Tom Lee State Award for Excellence in Floodplain Management is given in memory of Mr. Tom Lee, a floodplain management visionary who developed renowned state-level programs and helped to create the floodplain management framework that is used today. The award is given annually to recognize outstanding state-wide floodplain management programs, products or activities.

For more information on ASFPM, and the National 2011 Tom Lee State Award, please visit www.floods.org.

With its ease for broadcasting, social-media communication has exploded into numerous forms with millions of users. That number is expected to increase to more than 1 billion by 2012, according to a survey by technology consulting firm Strategy Analytics.

Because of the capabilities offered through services such as Twitter and Facebook, the Division uses the sources to provide a greater means of communication with Florida’s residents, guests, businesses and other governmental offices.

“Social media provides real-time dissemination of critical information for multiple contacts,” said William Booher, External Affairs Director for the Division. “Employing these options enables the Division to increase services and provide information on an even timelier basis.”

Among the social media options the Division offers are three Twitter accounts: @FLSERT offers general program and emergency information, news releases, interesting facts, videos and photos of current events; @FLSERTWeather retransmits significant severe weather alerts and statements issued by the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center that are specific to Florida, as well as links to weather-related press releases and Florida hazardous weather awareness data; @FLStateWatch provides daily feed of breaking news and hazard alerts from the Florida State Watch Office Operations Team for all 67 Florida counties.

Facebook, another popular social media forum, is our most recent outreach service and provides users with yet another option to readily access Division and disaster information in a manner that suits them.

“Social Media Used During Disasters Increases Efforts

“We provide additional quality information through these social media operations,” said Booher. “But we also use them to quickly scout and respond to any rumors or misleading information posted outside of our office.”

During a worst-case scenario, however, your computer service may not be available. We therefore encourage Floridians to have a plan and be prepared with more than just a cell phone.

The Division continuously strives to promote public awareness through traditional and emerging media platforms in order to provide clear, concise information to the general public, the emergency management community and news media. As technology continues to emerge, DEM will continue to explore avenues that allow us to provide the best service possible.
Communicating with them after a storm hits will help determine where the state needs to set the distribution of food, water and ice. Helping businesses get back to work as quickly as possible after a hurricane enables them to provide needed services to the area, such as medical provisions, groceries or home repair materials.

The Conference also reviewed planning for Florida’s residents and visitors, with an emphasis on spurring preparedness after several years of limited or no direct impact from tropical weather. “There’s a natural complacency that comes after five years of not having a hurricane, so we have to overcome that inertia,” Koon said. “While Floridians have a heightened awareness for the potential impact of disasters in their community with the recent tornadoes and the Mississippi River flooding, we hope to reinforce their awareness and help ensure they are fully prepared for any potential disasters.”

Much like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Division and its local counterparts continuously urge people to be prepared for the first few days after a hurricane or other disaster. “Florida’s residents should have a disaster plan to help them through at least the first three days after a disaster strikes,” said Koon. “With the help of our residents, Florida can more readily respond to other measures needed to address the overall safety, health and recuperation of the devastated area.”

In order to better prepare Florida’s business community for disasters, John Cherry, the Division’s private sector coordinator, sets up disaster training for Florida’s businesses and works to improve communication with small- and medium-sized businesses, which don’t have as many resources as larger corporations to recuperate from a disaster. “It is vital that we ensure our business community is also prepared for disasters,” said Cherry. “If we can quickly get our businesses back up and running after a disaster, then parents can go back to work, children can go back to school, and the community can recover faster.”

The state also has been working to streamline communication among Florida’s counties and to improve support for smaller counties with tighter budgets and fewer resources, Koon said. He also stresses that successful emergency response during and after hurricanes and other disasters depend on good information sharing and innovative solutions.

Helping Florida’s residents and businesses prepare for disasters is a complex responsibility for the organizations and agencies committed to preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation – one they willingly accept and continually improve upon. By providing a variety of services and options, the Division enables all Floridians to be aware of and plan for potential disasters, thereby enabling them to survive as well as thrive.
While a full week is dedicated to wildfire awareness, the Division promotes wildfire safety awareness throughout the year. “Unlike hurricane season, wildfires are year-round threats,” said David Halstead, the Division’s Deputy Director. “We continually remind residents and visitors statewide to practice fire safety, especially when Florida faces above-normal temperatures combined with breezy winds, low humidity, low chances for rain and very high drought values.”

With summer parties and cookouts, Floridians are urged to practice caution when using flammable materials in and outside of the home at all times; added precautions should be used when dry conditions exist.

The Fire Danger Index, from the Florida Division of Forestry, shows Florida counties at a high to very high risk for wildfires and Red Flag Warnings posted by the National Weather Service.

Along with Firewise prevention measures, officials urge residents to follow these guidelines set by the Division of Forestry:
- Burning yard waste does not require an authorization from the Division of Forestry, but you should check with your local city and county officials to see if there are any restrictions in your area.
- Your fire must be contained to an eight-foot diameter pile or non-combustible barrel and must be at least 25 feet from forests, 25 feet from your house, 50 feet from a paved public road, and 150 feet from other occupied buildings.
- Don’t burn on windy days or when humidity is below 30 percent.
- Never leave a fire unattended, and make sure it is out before you leave.

National Safe Boating Week

The National Boating Safety Week campaign, which ran May 23-28, is designed to help reduce boating fatalities and accidents by generating an awareness of operator and passenger behavior on the water and to encourage boaters to take personal responsibility for their own safety and the safety of their passengers by following four key tenets of safe boating:
- Always wear your life jacket.
- Never boat under the influence.
- Take a boating safety course.
- Get a free Vessel Safety Check.

Florida’s Atlantic and Gulf coasts also attract plenty of boaters year-round and Florida leads the nation with nearly one million registered boats. Before venturing out on the water, it is important for boaters to check on the weather. What may seem like a tranquil start to the day can quickly turn violent with hazards such as severe thunderstorms, strong winds, rough seas, lightning and waterspouts.

One way to be sure you are safe while boating is to check the marine forecasts issued by the local National Weather Service Offices when planning your voyage. Stay in port if thunderstorms are expected. If you decide to venture out into the open waters, remember that lightning presents the greatest danger to boaters. Be prepared to seek safe shelter anytime lightning is seen or thunder is heard. Never let thunderstorms cut off your route back to land.

If a thunderstorm or waterspout threatens, it is best to seek safe harbor immediately. If you are unable to get back to the dock, be sure everyone aboard is wearing a life jacket, as gusty thunderstorm winds or waterspouts can quickly overturn small boats. If lightning is nearby, get low or head below deck, and stay away from masts and ungrounded metal objects. If caught near a waterspout, your best course of evasive action is to move at a 90 degree angle from its apparent movement, then seek safe harbor, if possible.
Hurricane Preparedness Week

This year, Governor Scott proclaimed May 22 – 28 as Florida Hurricane Preparedness Week. The Division heralded the week with a reminder to Floridians to include children and teens in their hurricane preparedness planning by introducing them to KidsGetAPlan.

“KidsGetAPlan was designed to give Florida’s youngest residents an engaging and educational tool to learn about disaster preparedness,” said Bryan W. Koon, the Division’s Director. “The website was created specifically to help children better understand preparing for potential disasters in a non-threatening way with friendly characters and fun activities.”

The ambassador of KidsGetAPlan is Professor Tinkermeister. Along with his crew of kids and critters, the Professor encourages children to prepare safety measures for different types of severe weather. Through a variety of games, coloring pages, screen savers and weather-related data, children from kindergarten to high school learn about disaster preparedness.

This fun, interactive website presents basic weather safety and emergency preparedness concepts through age-appropriate activities and stories. While online, kids can play games that teach them how to build a disaster supply kit, practice proper lightning safety, and understand other essential safety facts.

The Division also published short books on the website, written to grade-level standards that explain complex topics such as disaster evacuations and emergency sheltering.

For grown ups, the Division offers GetAPlan!, a utility that helps them prepare for disasters as well. Preparedness options are also provided for business owners.

National Rip Current Awareness Week

National Rip Current Awareness Week was recognized this year June 5 – 11. These currents are the leading surf hazard for all beach-goers and account for more than 80 percent of beach rescues each year. Rip currents are powerful channels of fast-moving water that can be found along any shore that has breaking waves. They are very common in Florida and can be found along our beaches at any time during the year.

Forces of incoming waves, water levels and the shape of the land under the sea are all contributing factors to where and when a rip current may form. These currents can typically carry objects out to sea at 1-2 feet per second but can reach speeds of eight feet per second, which is faster than an Olympic swimmer!

If you find yourself caught in a rip current, don’t fight it. Fighting the current will only tire you out and put you at risk of drowning from exhaustion. You will feel yourself being pulled out to sea but don’t panic as rip currents usually only go out to just past the breakers. Rip currents do not pull you under the water, rather they carry you away from shore very quickly. The best course of action is to swim left or right of the current (parallel to shore) and when you no longer feel the pull, slowly swim back towards the beach. If you are in a strong rip current and cannot get away, relax and calmly float or tread water to conserve energy; eventually the current will lose strength and you can then swim diagonally back to shore.

If you see someone in trouble that may be caught in a rip current, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.

Always look for warning flags when arriving at a beach and remember that the safest way to swim is within sight of a lifeguard. For more information about rip current safety and your surf zone forecast, visit www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.

Lightning Safety Week

Though we often think of hurricanes and tornados when we think of hazardous weather in Florida, many people would be surprised that, on average, lightning strikes are responsible for more weather-related deaths than all of our weather hazards combined. In 2010, more than 20 people died from lightning strikes.

This year, the National Weather Service recognized June 19-25 as Lightning Safety Week and officials from the Division urged Floridians to have a plan of action for lightning conditions as they would for any other disaster.

“With Florida’s severe thunderstorms, lightning is a serious and deadly threat,” said Director Bryan W. Koon. “Floridians should pay close attention to changing weather conditions when outdoors and seek shelter when they hear thunder.”

The most dangerous place to be during a thunderstorm is in an open area. While trees may offer shelter from the rain, they provide no protection from lightning. Covered picnic shelters, tents and canvas tops on convertibles offer no protection from lightning either. During a thunderstorm, the safest place to be is in a substantial building, such as a home, away from the windows. Vehicles with metal roofs also provide safe shelter from lightning.

National Weather Service and the Florida Division of Emergency Management encourage families and businesses to incorporate the 30/30 Rule when conducting outdoor activities. This two-part rule states that people should first seek immediate shelter once the time between a lightning flash and thunder is 30 seconds or less. The second part of this rule states that people should remain in safe shelter for 30 minutes following the final clap of thunder. Many lightning strike victims assumed that the threat had passed once a thunderstorm’s rains had ended, when in fact lightning can travel far from the core of a storm’s downpours.
Employees’ Corner

Employee of the Month April 2011
Lou Ritter, the Division’s Employee of the Month for April, works in the Bureau of Preparedness/Technology Hazards Section. One of his responsibilities is managing hazardous materials program grant contracts related to hazardous materials planning, training and exercise activities. He exhibits a high level of hazardous materials technical expertise and willingly shares his knowledge to enhance hazardous materials awareness throughout Florida. Additionally, Ritter’s strong knowledge of the emergency management system benefits Florida during disasters and results in a better end-product related to county comprehensive emergency management plans reviews. He also displays creative skills by developing hazardous materials program-related documents which improve time-management capabilities.

Recently, Ritter was assigned, and has enthusiastically performed, the task formerly assigned to the program administrator of facilitating the activities of the State Emergency Response Commission’s Training Task Force. He also volunteered to help conduct Risk Management Planning Program on-site audits while a vacant position was being filled. Finally, Ritter participates in ensuring the hazardous materials web page is kept up to date. Going above and beyond for the betterment of the hazardous material program, Ritter continually contributes to the reason Florida is known as a leader in emergency management.

Employee of the Month May 2011
Gary Crawford, the Division’s Employee of the Month for May, is finance and planning manager. Currently working in the Bureau of Mitigation, Crawford has also been working with the Bureau of Recovery for over a year due to his knowledge of budgets, finances and FEMA requirements. Known throughout the office for his hard work and accomplishing numerous projects, one of Crawford’s major feats was a method he developed for the Division to track payments and reconcile those expenditures to FLAIR. Another accomplishment was his development of state management cost documentation required by FEMA to obtain annual funding. FEMA approved the funding and considered the documentation report to be a best practice. Crawford used this same reconciliation within the Bureau of Recovery with great success. These methods enhance our ability to obtain timely FEMA funding needed for state management operations. The extra hours and effort he put into the development of these processes gives the Division a clearer financial overview of current disaster expenditure data for Recovery as well as for Mitigation.

Crawford further established his ability through his oversight of the Bureau’s development of the payment database, mitigation.org. This database enables the Division to ensure the FLAIR payment codes are correct prior to processing a payment, allowing for easier reconciliation of disaster/project payment records.

Along with his financial prowess, Crawford is well known for his ability to complete his projects in a timely manner and his sense of humor. With these credentials and many other fine attributes, his award is well earned.

Employee of the Month June 2011
Donna Riordan, a Public Information Officer in the Division’s Office of External Affairs, is responsible for drafting many of the Division’s public outreach materials, including brochures, handouts and social media pieces. Recently, Riordan contacted numerous regional parenting magazines around the state and pitched the Division’s KidsGetAPlan awareness campaign with an article she drafted.

Due to this initiative, the article was published in 12 major parenting and community magazines, which introduced families around the state to this unique disaster preparedness resource. Based on the relationship she built with these publications, Riordan also procured future publishing opportunities for the Division’s family preparedness and awareness campaigns.

New Employees and Promotions

• Katherine Brooks, Grants Specialist V, Bureau of Recovery
• John Hartman, Planner IV, Bureau of Mitigation
• Theresa Price, Grants Specialist V, Bureau of Recovery

• Brett Bolton, Intern, External Affairs
• Monique Carby, Government Analyst II, Bureau of Recovery
• Michael Day, Community Assistance Consultant, Director’s Office/Homeland Security
• Robert Dietrick, Planner II, Bureau of Preparedness
• Michelle Faircloth, promoted to Purchasing Agent III, Director’s Office
• Enrique Hernandez, Environmental Specialist II, Bureau of Recovery
• Robert Little, Staff Development Training Consultant, Bureau of Preparedness
• Tasha Williams, State Warning Point Operator, Bureau of Response

• Tara Walters, promoted to Community Assistance Consultant within the Director’s Office
• George Bowen, Electronic Technician II, Bureau of Response

• Heather Komarnisky, appointed Senior Attorney
• Leo Lachat, appointed Chief of the Bureau of Recovery
• Adele Balmer, Environmental Specialist II, Bureau of Mitigation
• Russell Collins, Government Analyst I, Bureau of Mitigation
• Linda Susan Roberts, Administrative Assistant I, Bureau of Recovery
Florida Division of Emergency Management

Our Mission
Working together to ensure that Florida is prepared to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate against their impacts.

Our Vision
Failure is not an option.

Our Motto
Semper Gumby - Always Flexible

Director’s Standing Orders
1. Take care of the needs of survivors.
2. Take care of the needs of responders.
3. When in doubt, re-read number one.