

HURRICANE EXERCISE SHOWS LAYERED COMMUNICATIONS WORKS

FORT MYERS, FL—Lee County participation in a statewide testing of catastrophic hurricane plans proved many layers of public and volunteer communications are more beneficial than the few traditional layers. Phase one of the exercise ends today, although additional training events continue later this month.

Lee County's Emergency managers plan to use billboards, Twitter, the website www.lee-eoc.com , webinars, conference calls and Lee TV in addition to the traditional emergency radio, TV and print news media methods of communications. Internal communications will also improve so receptionists are better able to answer questions from the public.

One administrative assistant said she learned that she needs to read the All Hazards Guide annually, just as everyone needs to build their preparedness kit and update their plan annually, in order to refresh her memory and learn about new things that can benefit the public in a disaster.

Program coordinators said they learned the importance of the detail of a plan being pre-determined. One even identified a void in the plan, and has since discovered the void is more than local or statewide.

Josh Roberts, Services and Volunteer Coordinator, discovered there is no one coordinating faith-based agencies volunteers or donations. Each handles their own effort and the result can be frustrating for everyone involved as those who want to help are delayed and the donations they send are sometimes unusable. Having a coordinator would limit the frustrations of those trying to help and guarantee appropriate help arrived in a timely manner, said Roberts.

Attendance at the EOC nearly doubled from the 54 registered attendees to 95 the day of the briefing, which Planning Manager Gerald Campbell says shows agencies are taking disaster preparedness seriously. Campbell said broadcasting the initial exercise briefing on Lee TV also increased attendance and saved money for participating agencies.

Locally, one exercise is continues this morning with a Point of Distribution (POD) trailer on South Fort Myers beach at Santini Plaza. The statewide exercise continues on the 18th and 24th.

The 2009 Atlantic Hurricane Season runs from June 1 through November 30, 2009. To develop your personalized family or business disaster plan or find out about attending preparedness seminars, go to: www.leeec.com .

All students, teachers and parents can find educational information and free downloadable materials at: www.KidsGetAPlan.com. And for the latest daily situation and flash reports go to: www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT .