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Severe Weather Preparedness Program Hosts Student Simulations at County and Municipal EOCs and School Gymnasiums

By Bay Proby, Program Director, StormZone

StormZone, an IAEM-Global partner, is a nine-year-old school-based, multi-disciplinary social studies and science education program that teaches students about safety and preparedness, exploring the science of severe natural hazards, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, severe winter weather, extreme heat, wildfires, and earthquakes.

Students Learn in Classrooms and by Participating in EOC Exercise

Designed specifically for 6-12 grades, students learn how to build a disaster survival kit and a family communication plan, as well as the importance of volunteerism, to share with their families and friends.

The program also teaches how emergency management agencies work with federal, state and local governments to prepare for and recover from such disasters, featuring an interactive exercise where students form their own government and plan and recover from a major weather event or earthquake. Following was the 2015 exercise held at the Miami-Dade (Florida) Emergency Operations Center, where 60 Shenandoah Middle School students, called Weather Rangers, took on Hurricane Carlos.

As Hurricane computer images of Category 3 Hurricane Carlos got closer to South Florida's coast, Mayor Maya Marrero was barking orders to her fellow *Weather Rangers* to prepare for the worst.

While student meteorologists provided storm briefings to student reporters, a fire in a shelter needed to be extinguished and 1,000 people immediately had to be relocated to other shelters.

Her responsibility was to coordinate Emergency Support Functions (ESF in emergency management parlance) managed by her classmates (firefighting, transportation, law enforcement, search and rescue, medical assistance, hazardous materials, animal services and mass care, to name a few) to tend to the injured and ensure that the dispossessed people were properly relocated to other shelters and safe from the approaching storm. "Put the fire out, and help the injured first," ordered Marrero to Fire Fighters Team Leader Sara Baquedano. "Start removing the people," she directed Transportation Team Leader Yaslynn Perez.

Facing New Problems after Resolving Previous Ones

As soon as the problem was resolved, an overturned truck on a major evacuation route left thousands of motorists stranded. Gas from the truck was spilling all over the road; people were overheated and thirsty; and several fights erupted due to short tempers. To make things worse, pets were escaping. Again, the mayor had to depend on her fellow students to resolve this perilous situation and direct broadcast reporters to alert motorists to avoid this route out of town. "We need to get water out to



Shenandoah Middle School students learn about the importance of emergency management through a hurricane simulation at the Miami-Dade County EOC. Sixty students were challenged to manage pre- and post-landfall challenges caused by Category 3 Hurricane Carlos.

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Severe Weather Preparedness Program

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these people as soon as possible, contain the spill, and remove the truck from the roadway,” Marrero demanded. “Get Resource Management, Hazardous Materials, Law Enforcement, and Mass Care alerted. We need to move fast.”

After Carlos’s passage, the students faced equally challenging emergencies, such as several hundred senior citizens stranded on an island by a washed-out intra-coastal bridge. “We’ve sent boats, helicopters, and anything we can,” said Mayor Marrero.

In the meantime, the local zoo has taken a terrible toll from Hurricane Carlos. There is massive flooding, leaving people and animals stranded. Numerous animals are missing and need to be captured. It has been reported that a lion mauled a resident in a nearby neighborhood and that an elephant is roaming through another neighborhood. Animal Rescue Team Leader Victor Morales went to work. There has been a fuel spill from a large gas tank on the property, and several animals and zoo workers have been injured. “We acted quickly and got the job done,” added Marrero.

At the student press conference concluding the exercise, Mayor Marrero proudly informed the student reporters, “There were numerous injuries caused by Hurricane Carlos, but fortunately there were no fatalities.”

Learn More

To learn more about StormZone and the *Weather Rangers* student outreach program, visit www.stormzone.us or contact Program Director Bay Proby at (305) 613-4668 or bp@stormzone.us. ▲

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The Significance of Personal Effects

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items with the utmost respect and dignity throughout. This is particularly demonstrated in the care that the professionals show in how they present the items upon return to the family. There is a fine line between not wanting these items to appear as if they are a new item delivered from a department store, whilst demonstrating to the families that thought, consideration, and respect have been shown in their presentation.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is no doubt that the victims’ families place a high emotional value on the safe return of their loved one’s personal possessions. Likewise, it is extremely important that the emergency management professionals working in this field recognise this fact and do everything they possibly can to facilitate this in the most dignified way possible.

Looking Forward to Part 3 of this Series

The final part of this series exploring the personal effects process will address the process (systems and procedures) itself, how it has evolved and where further progress may be made in the future. ▲

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