

NEIGHBORS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2007 | EDITOR: MARIKA LYNCH | 305-376-3555 | MiamiHerald.com/Neighbors

PPO3 The Miami Herald

MIAMI-DADE

Students test emergency system

■ Fifty Miami-Dade middle schoolers got a shot at handling a major emergency last week on a visit to the county's Emergency Operations Center.

BY ANA RHODES
Special to The Miami Herald

Hurricane Jaime, a Category 3 storm, has just hit Miami and a hospital overcrowded with storm victims is out of food and water and has no power.

And it's up to 50 Miami-Dade middle school students to solve the problem.

"We're sending over a mobile feeding van and a water storage truck," said Cameron Cronje, 13, an eighth-grader from Richmond Heights Middle School, who was working the government purchasing arena, wearing his headset and communicating with other EOC personnel. "You have to move people. It's cool to sit in these chairs and use the phones."

This was one of the various scenarios playing out at Miami-Dade County's Emergency Operations Center last week, where the students from South Dade's Richmond Heights Middle School and Doral's Eugenia E. Thomas Middle School acted out a hurricane simulation.

Students were split up among posts and had to be fire rescue coordinators, relief workers, Florida Power & Light representatives, reporters and meteorologists. One student was even the mayor. They wore headsets and sat at operations center phone banks, calling each other in different departments to coordinate their efforts. A giant screen tracking the storm loomed above.

"You get to learn what a hard job it is, how to work under a lot of pressure," said Daniel Gomez, 11, who was an FPL representative who sent generators to the hospital.

The event was part of the StormZone curriculum which has been in middle schools



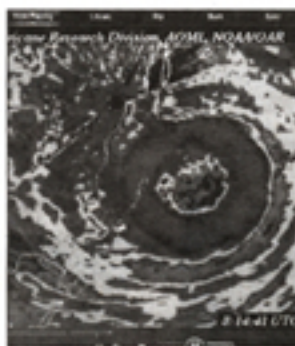
PHOTOS BY PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

EMERGENCY DRILL: Teacher Sofia Inguanzo leads students through the hurricane simulation at Miami-Dade County's Emergency Operations Center. Below is the screen students used to track the pretend storm.

since 1999. StormZone Director Bay Proby said the program features a combination of civics and science designed to teach students all about emergency operations.

Hurricane Warning, a hurricane education center in Deerfield Beach, also partnered with Storm Zone and similar simulations will take place at the Broward EOC and the Palm Beach EOC over the next few months.

"These could be the future emergency operations personnel. This is a critical opportunity to learn about science and get a life lesson. With Noel, they could see it take place for real," Aymee Ruiz, with State Farm Corporate Media, said, referencing



the storm that loomed over South Florida last week.

State Farm, along with DHL, sponsors StormZone.

At one point the different groups had to work together to figure out what to do when

a tractor trailer carrying hazardous material crashed on the highway — blocking all lanes — an hour before the storm was about to hit.

"We had to call a pumping truck for the fire and to call the police to clear the route," said Kasandra Mendez, 13, an eighth-grader from Richmond Heights Middle School.

"It's really cool how we're here helping people. That's what makes it so much fun."

The mayor, sixth-grader Antonio Pereira from Eugenia E. Thomas Middle School, dispatched urban rescue to clear the chaotic scene.

"It's nice having a little control, working together and calling people," Antonio said. "It feels so life-like."

Even the student meteorologists were grilled by student media about the intensity of the hurricane and how it formed. They were ready with answers about the warm waters in the Caribbean and about global warming.

The students were well prepared for the exercise, as they had reviewed their roles in their science classes at school. But a classroom exercise and real world experience at the EOC are different.

"This brings a global perspective of how the city works and how important it is to work together during a hurricane," said Sofia Inguanzo, sixth-grade science teacher at Eugenia E. Thomas Middle School.