

October 6, 2006

StormZone

A hurricane preparedness program for the classroom debuts in South Florida public schools

As the saying goes, education is the first line of defense against dangerous hurricanes.

What better way to get this message across than to teach preparedness to South Florida's students, who then bring its importance home to their families.

Enter StormZone, a hurricane preparedness classroom exercise that was initiated in Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Broward and Monroe County public schools in September, peak hurricane season.

StormZone is a school-based educational program designed specifically for middle and high schools that helps students understand the importance of advance preparation when confronted with a natural disaster such as a hurricane.

Sponsored by DHL Express and Hurricane Warning! at Disaster Survival House, StormZone is a three-hour emergency preparedness simulation for the classroom that lets students form their own local government and simulate a fictitious hurricane slamming into their town.

Up to 400,000 South Florida students have the opportunity to participate in this emergency-related interactive exercise.

"Children are huge influencers on parents and guardians, and stu-

dents in these classes will learn first-hand how to plan, prepare, respond and recover in emergency situations and explain this to their families," said Kelly Keogh, director of corporate citizenship, DHL.

"We see this valuable investment in the StormZone program as a proactive step to target DHL employees and our hometown South Florida community in communicating the importance of emergency planning. The role-playing dynamics experienced by StormZone participants are very similar to what happens in real-life situations ranging from communication methods to the allocation of resources."

"Through this interactive, interdisciplinary exercise, students learn about emergency management, make the decisions necessary to respond to a disaster in their community and develop a recovery plan," says Bay Proby, creator of StormZone and the program's coordinator.

"This classroom experience also lets students learn about the importance of individual responsibility, organizational collaboration and project management skills when confronted with a hurricane."

Although the 2006 hurricane season has been surprisingly quiet,

Proby emphasizes the need for everyone to be vigilant, keeping in mind that it isn't over until it's over. A hurricane season ends Nov. 30th.

To conduct the exercise, students form their own civic government by electing a mayor, and appointing an emergency manager.

The remaining students are designated to carry out specific emergency management functions such as housing and shelter, energy services, fire fighting, law enforcement, health and medical care, food and water, transportation and communications that are critical to preparing for and recovering from a hurricane.

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They then reconfigure their classroom into an actual Emergency Operations Center and simulate a variety of problem-solving exercises that require the participation of all of the "city's" officials and the emergency support personnel.

For instance, for a pre-landfall exercise while the storm approaches, a fire breaks out in a shelter, leaving more than 1,000 people waiting helplessly to be relocated.

A post-landfall exercise: senior citizens in a high rise on a heavily populated island are stranded due

to a damaged bridge. They are without power, food, water and basic medical care.

At the conclusion of the exercise, the student mayor conducts a press conference to inform student reporters on preparedness measures that were taken prior to the storm and recovery efforts after its passage.

"The StormZone simulations provide students with an excellent education into how emergency operations centers function and illustrate the importance of com-

munication, teamwork, local responders and being prepared," says Erik Salna, Project Coordinator, Disaster Survival House and Hurricane Warning!

According to Proby, any middle and high school is eligible to teach StormZone.

"Contact us at 305-670-0323 and we will email the school a Teacher's Guideline. Following the instructions, the science teacher can coordinate the exercise very quickly," he says.