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September is National Preparedness Month: Are You Ready?

Last year's record hurricane season brought disasters to the nation's immediate attention and into your living rooms for many months. So far this decade, disasters have cost the United States thousands of lives and an average of \$100 billion annually.

A disaster is any event that overwhelms a community's ability to respond. In our area of the country, such events include floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, drought, hazardous material spills and fires. Are you ready if such an event were to happen in your community? It is imperative that individuals be prepared to care for themselves until emergency help arrives.

There are three main points to know for disaster preparation: Know risks and danger signs, assemble an emergency supplies kit and develop a communication/evacuation plan. Once you know the risks and danger signs for your area, begin planning. Talk with your family about how you might shelter in your home or evacuate, gather emergency supplies and medical needs for your family and pets, know how your family will stay in contact and teach children how and when to use 911.

Individual preparedness is critical, but there will always be people who cannot prepare because of disabilities or lack of financial resources or awareness. To help them, many Americans have stepped forward to take the Certified Emergency Response Team training (CERT). This training prepares citizens to help others in their neighborhood until emergency responders arrive. Volunteers are not limited to emergency responders; all types of volunteers are needed. You could help answer phones or do office work at the Red Cross or other organizations responding to the emergency. Most communities need more people to take this training and assist in their disaster planning.

Information is available online at www.citizencorps.gov/cert/ or you can talk with someone at your local emergency management agency.

Disaster education is hard to sell. Just ask any emergency manager who has called a public information meeting about disaster preparedness and has had little or no response. In most cases, public attention is focused on disaster issues for only a short time after an event. News media is helpful in getting the word out, but sometimes educational messages are lost in the traumatic coverage of the event. This underscores the importance of learning the risks for your community and listening to emergency management alerts about any given emergency. For more information on Food Safety/Preservation/Preparation contact your local County Extension Office or Angela Treadaway your Regional Extension Agent at 205-410-3696.