

FEMA REACHING OUT TO THE YOUNG — AND YOUNG AT HEART

AUSTIN, Texas — It's never too early — or too late — to get Texans thinking about how to plan for an emergency. That's the reasoning behind special programs the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is conducting for elementary and high school students, as well as for senior citizens, at various locations throughout the Hurricane Ike disaster area.

For the youngest audience, FEMA is teaming up with the Red Cross and local firefighters to present the "FEMA for Kids" program at schools in Galveston, Chambers and Harris counties. The program is a fun-filled event with a serious message: "Prepare. Plan. Stay informed."

"Kids can be our best emissaries when it comes to spreading the emergency preparedness message. After a FEMA for Kids event they'll talk to their friends and they'll ask their parents what they've done to protect the family," said Federal Coordinating Officer Brad Harris. "This gets the parents motivated to take action."

Presented to fourth graders, FEMA for Kids is an activity-driven event that teaches the students how to put together family disaster preparedness kits, how to use first aid, the importance of having evacuation plans for both people and pets, and how to express disaster experiences and feelings through art. Students also learn to "prepare for the unexpected" while playing online games at the Ready Kids Web site: www.ready.gov/kids.

The "FEMA for Seniors" program has many of the same messages as the program for kids, but includes issues of concern to older Texans, such as evacuating with medication and medical equipment and taking charge of personal safety. The program, which is being offered for the first time in any disaster, is presented in partnership with the Red Cross, the state of Texas and agencies that provide services for the aging.

"Sometimes senior citizens must respond to an emergency on their own, and that can be frightening," said State Coordinating Officer Joan Haun. "This program helps alleviate their fears because it teaches seniors how to be prepared."

Meanwhile, for high school students, FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Community Education and Outreach Group is providing building plans to schools in Houston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Orange and elsewhere. Using the plans and donated materials, the students are building 48-square-foot model structures with techniques proven to make homes and businesses stronger and safer. A finished model is on display at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, and one will be displayed at the Texas Homeland Security and Hurricane Conference in San Antonio later in March.

FEMA's Web site for children is www.fema.gov/kids. For information on Hurricane Ike, visit www.fema.gov/ike.

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

FEMA leads and supports the nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation, to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the nation from all hazards including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.