

## Take steps now to be prepared for disaster

By Patrick Fuller

It has been said many times that the price we pay for living in paradise is the occasional tropical storm or hurricane. Throw in tornadoes, wildfires, pandemics, the always looming potential cyber intrusion, and being prepared for everything, may seem daunting. Luckily the same things that prepare you for our tropical weather can help you through other events as well. Enhancing individual, family and business preparedness is not something someone else can do for you but Charlotte County Emergency Management and our disaster partners can provide resources and strategies to better prepare you to “survive” the immediate impacts of a disaster and to “recover” from the longer-term effects of disasters. Together we can foster a culture of preparedness and ensure a more resilient community.

Traditionally we think of preparedness as building a disaster kit, complete with food, water, flashlights, batteries, radios, cash, clothing, medication, first aid supplies, important documents, and, of course, supplies for our pets. Building and maintaining disaster kits is critical but just as important is having a plan that addresses where you will go if directed to evacuate, how you will get there, how you will communicate with loved ones, and how you will stay informed. The Charlotte County Emergency Management Disaster Planning Guide can walk you through both how to build your disaster kit and the considerations for your disaster plan. The Disaster Planning Guide even includes information about how to sign up for Alert Charlotte, our free emergency notification system. We refer to this level of preparedness that addresses your needs immediately before, during and after a disaster as “preparing to survive”.

Equally important, though sometimes forgotten, are the actions taken that “prepare you to recover”. Disasters of all shapes and sizes have the common theme of creating financial hardships. Those costs can be due to a number of things to include damaged property, increased costs of goods and services, debris removal, rental costs, and outright fraud. Actions you take now can help limit the extent of financial hardship and better prepare you for recovery after a disaster. There are a number of activities that can help better prepare you for your recovery and include: beginning a disaster savings account that you can rely on for emergency purchases in case your income is disrupted, maintaining and regularly reviewing your insurance coverage (home, renters, flood, life, health, auto, etc.) to ensure you have what you need, locating and keeping in one place the important documents you will need to make claims or apply for assistance, and contact a qualified financial counselor or coach.

Every one of us in Charlotte County is vulnerable to disasters. The things we do now to prepare can determine how our community looks afterwards. Please join us at one of our disaster preparedness talks at our Charlotte County public libraries that will be scheduled over the next several months and will be open to anyone wanting more information on preparedness. Additionally, there are great resources at the Charlotte County Office of Emergency Management webpage (<https://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/departments/public-safety/emergency-management/>), the Florida Division of Emergency Management (<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/>) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (ready.gov). By preparing to both “survive” and “recover” you, your family and business can put themselves in the best position to thrive after experiencing any disaster.

*Readers may reach Emergency Management Director Patrick Fuller at  
Patrick.Fuller@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.*