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News

Preparing for emergency: Director discusses what to do when a disaster strikes

By Tyler Heath, Sentinel reporter, theath@lewistownsentinel.com



Sentinel Photo by TYLER HEATH

'There are so many things you don't realize that are affected by power outages,' Juniata County Emergency Management Director Allen Weaver said Monday during a presentation on emergency preparedness planning in Mifflintown.

MIFFLINTOWN — How to prepare for emergencies and natural disasters was the focus of a presentation held Monday at the Central Juniata Emergency Medical Services building.

In an effort to educate the public on emergency preparedness, Elder Community Services Inc. sponsored the presentation, entitled "Being Prepared for Any and All Emergencies." Juniata County Emergency Management Director Allen Weaver was the primary speaker for the event.

Citing the 2006 Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness Guide and his own years of personal experience, Weaver instructed attendees on how to prepare for a natural disaster, large-scale emergency or unexpected attack.

"Back when hurricane Ivan came through, I lived in Cuba Mills, (and) we didn't have power for a week," Weaver said, explaining how unexpected disasters can quickly make life dangerous.

From short-term emergencies, such as chemical spills and furnace malfunctions, to long-term disasters, such as severe weather, power outages or fires, Weaver cited a list of

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hazardous scenarios that could impact residents of the Juniata Valley.

Supply and evacuation kits are highly recommended, Weaver said. Both kits allow individuals and families to survive through hard times when disaster strikes, he said.

According to the preparedness guide, "six basics" should be included in a emergency supply kit: water; food; first aid supplies; clothing and bedding; tools and supplies; and special items — for instance, children's needs or personal hygiene items.

The guide recommends using an easy-to-carry container, such as a large covered trash container, backpack or duffel bag, for the kit. A smaller version can be kept in the individual's automobile, Weaver said.

A more complete list of what to include in an emergency supply kit is available on several Web sites, including <http://www.pema.state.pa.us/>, <http://www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us/> and <http://www.health.state.pa.us/>

"I would suggest, at least, to start getting the emergency bag together. This is something that we are working with everyone on," Weaver said.

"A bag that will get you through that first eight to 12 hour period ... this is what we call a pre-plan bag. We (emergency or shelter personnel), for instance, will not be able to get things like prescriptions filled that quickly," he continued.

Among the hundreds of other items indicated by the guide, Weaver stressed the importance of prescription medications. Not only should the medications be included in the kit, but a list of dosages, related over-the-counter medicines and allergy information is needed, he said.

"How many of you have important documents in your home? If you do, I highly recommend, at the very least, having a waterproof container to put the documents in.

"I really would recommend you get a fire proof box for your home, or go to the local bank and get a safety deposit box . . . the are much safer," Weaver said.

The guide also recommends having an emergency contact list. Creating the list, a written plan and having the emergency kit on hand, the guide says, are key elements for being prepared and maintaining control in times of crisis.

Weaver pointed out that pets should be taken into consideration when preparing emergency kits and plans. Shelters often do not allow pets, and a plan for the animals should be established well ahead of time, he said.

"One final thing — if it's an emergency, feel free to call 911 ... we will do our best to get somebody there.

"We'll put boats in the rivers, boats in the creeks and boats in the streets — we'll do what has to be done," Weaver said.

For more information on local emergency management planning in Juniata County, call 436-2181, or in Mifflin County, call 248-9645.

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