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A Program of Portage County Commissioners

NEWS RELEASE

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PORTRAGE COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND COMMISSIONERS URGE RESIDENTS TO PREPARE FOR DISASTERS DURING NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

“Disasters Happen. Prepare Now. Learn How.” is the theme of this year’s National Preparedness Month sponsored by FEMA and Ready.gov during September. The objective of National Preparedness Month is to increase whole community preparedness.

It is a great time for families, business owners and communities to take specific steps to ready themselves for emergencies, said Ryan Shackelford, director of the Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

National Preparedness Month is broken into four distinct categories representing each week of the month: Week 1, making and practicing a family disaster plan; Week 2, learning lifesaving skills at the individual level; Week 3, insurance coverage for flooding and other natural hazards; and Week 4, financial readiness for disasters. Portage Prepares social media on Facebook and Twitter will feature the daily posts and tweets.

“2017 was the worst disaster year in United States history and most don’t know Ohio received a presidential declaration for severe Ohio River flooding. While Ohio may not be a hurricane state or deal with frightening wild fires, disasters and other emergencies can and do happen here,” said Shackelford.

National Preparedness Month provides an opportunity for county residents to prepare now and throughout the year for common northeast Ohio emergencies such as floods, hazardous materials spills, tornados and the soon to be here winter weather.

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“Most residents know they should be prepared for emergencies, but with such busy lives, haven't yet created or tested a family emergency plan,” said Vicki Kline, president of the Portage County Board of Commissioners.

“It's never too late to get ready, so we encourage all residents to take at least one action during September to make sure our families, businesses and communities are prepared for the next emergency,” said Portage County Commissioner Sabrina Christian-Bennett.

Shackelford pointed out the strong promotion of self-resiliency when it comes to preparing for emergencies. With topics such as emergency plans, insurance coverage and financial disaster preparation, it is evident that FEMA is encouraging individuals, families and business to prepare themselves as much as possible. Portage County EMA mimics this endeavor and provides a strong public education campaign on many available platforms.

“During disasters, it's all hands-on deck to respond and recover. Everyone has responsibility to take care of themselves, families and even neighbors. Knowing basic life saving techniques, having a plan and emergency kit of essential supplies and ensuring your home and belongings are insured is vital to your overall safety and recovery post-disaster,” said Shackelford.

“Just last November we saw a severe wind event cripple transportation and energy infrastructure in Aurora and Mantua Township. With cold temperatures following, it made the incident even worse. We truly encourage residents to heed preparedness actions if local first responders and other organizations cannot get to you,” said Mike Kerrigan, Portage County Commissioner.

Among the most important actions people can take toward disaster preparedness are:

- Put together an emergency supply kit containing items that will allow families to survive for at least three days in the event of an emergency, developing and practicing a plan that addresses sheltering in place or evacuating the area, staying informed about different threats that could affect your community and getting involved by training in first aid and emergency response. Visit Ready.Gov at ready.gov for basic steps.
- Create a family emergency communications plan. Decide how and where everyone will meet up with each other if separated, choose an out-of-town emergency contact for your family and give that person's phone number to each family member, make a sheet of emergency contacts and post it in visible places in your home and workplace. Don't rely on your smart phone or online contact lists. There are resources to help you plan at Ready.Gov. Go to ready.gov/make-a-plan.
- Get a NOAA Weather Radio to hear tornado warnings and other weather alerts issued directly by the National Weather Service.

- Sign-up for text alerts/weather warnings that may be offered by your community. Check the local government website for a link.
- Download the free Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management App for access to weather information, local alerts and weather warnings, links to local social media, contacts of local first responders and more. At the iPhone Store and Google+ for Androids.
- Follow Portage Prepares, the county's social media preparedness resource, on Facebook (facebook.com/PortagePrepares) and Twitter (twitter.com/PortagePrep) for education and information on local emergencies. Visit the Portage County Office of
- Visit the Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management webpage on the county website at co.portage.oh.us/homeland-security-emergency-management for more information.
- Talk to an insurance agent about flood insurance. Most homeowner's insurance policies do not cover flooding; renters and business owners also can get flood insurance. Just one inch of water in a mid-size home or office can mean thousands of dollars in repairs. Go to floodsmart.gov or call 1-800-427-4661 for more information.
- Download the Safer Ohio app through the Ohio State Highway Patrol to report suspicious activity as part of the "See Something, Say Something" campaign. The application provider uses patent-pending privacy protection software for safeguarding the integrity of tips and citizen's personal information. The app is available through the Apple App Store and on Google Play.

You can follow activities on social media for National Preparedness Month at facebook.com/readygov, twitter.com/Readygov and at the hashtags, #NatlPrep, #FloodSmart and #PrepareNow.

"By joining our social media community, you are helping family, friends, neighbors and others who connect with you to be more aware that they need to prepare and how to respond when there is an emergency. From severe weather to road closures, if we can direct you away from emergencies, it keeps you safe and it helps first responders," said Amie Cajka, public information officer for PC OHS/EM.

PC OHS/EM in conjunction with Portage County Commissioners leads preparedness planning, training, disaster exercises and response to large scale emergencies in the county. Representatives from communities, local government, fire, law enforcement, health, mental health and recovery, PARTA and the American Red Cross work with commissioners and PC OHS/EM through the Portage County Emergency Management Advisory Committee and the Local Emergency Planning Committee to keep Portage County residents safe.

The Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is located at 8240 Infirmary Road, Ravenna, Ohio, 44266. The phone is 330-297-3607.