

Opinion

Residents urged to prepare for hurricanes

By Roy Gold

Hope for the best and plan for the worst. With hurricane season having officially begun June 1 and remaining a concern through Nov. 30, that's the advice cities once again are sharing with their residents. Most South Floridians know about shopping for hurricane survival basics, such as bottled water, packaged foods and batteries, but seasoned survivors of previous storms know the work really begins in the aftermath as we deal with the damage left in a hurricane's wake. Now is the time for all of us to create our individual hurricane preparedness plans.

As president of the Broward League of Cities, I want to remind residents of all municipalities that each city publishes an annual hurricane preparedness update, including locations of public shelters and other essential information. Cities distribute this information to their residents using a variety of communication techniques, including posting it on the city's website. As you assemble your updated hurricane preparedness kit, it is wise to prepare your own personal emergency plan, including the following information:

Create a contact sheet. Assemble a list of all important emergency phone numbers, e-mail addresses and personal contacts you may need after the storm has passed, such as police and fire-rescue, family members, your insurance company and your bank. Store the list in a water-tight plastic bag by the phone as well as in your hurricane kit.

Know your evacuation route. Regardless of predictions regarding an impending storm's intensity, know your city's evacuation plan and have a route in place. Residents in low-lying areas, such as those who live east of I-95 and closer to the beach, will be asked to evacuate during Category 1, 2 or 3 hurricanes. Identify in advance the important stops along your route, including gas stations, food stores, banks and hotels.

Research shelter locations. Each city provides information about public shelters to accommodate hurricane evacuation. Residents should know prior to a major storm the locations of shelters closest to their homes and what personal items they should and should not bring. Pet owners should locate and contact pet-friendly shelters in the event they need to evacuate.

As South Floridians, we know that adequate hurricane preparation is the key to avoiding confusion and chaos. Creating a contact list, knowing your evacuation route and researching local shelters will go a long way in alleviating an already stressful situation. For more tips on creating a hurricane preparedness plan, you can visit the Florida Division of Emergency Management at www.FloridaDisaster.org or your city's official website.

Roy Gold is president of the Broward League of Cities and a Coral Springs city commissioner.