

By GUS BILIRAKIS

As Floridians, we know all too well the devastation encountered when a major hurricane strikes. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, exposed the citizens of the United States to a whole new spectrum of emergency preparedness response. Never before had we realized that an unforeseen enemy could come onto our soil and wreak so much havoc on innocent and unsuspecting citizens. Since September is National Preparedness Month, it is an excellent opportunity to ensure that we have survival supplies and a plan in place should we face a national disaster-be it natural or man-made.

Emergency preparedness begins right in our homes. Each household should have an emergency kit comprised of basic survival necessities. A comprehensive list of materials to include in the kit can be found at www.ready.gov.

The next step of successful emergency preparedness is to have a plan in place for you and your family in the event of a disaster. Family members need to know how to contact one another after the immediate danger passes. Since local phone lines may be inaccessible, the best way to do so may be to have a long distance contact with whom everyone can check-in. All need to be informed of the number and have a mode of contact-including coins or calling cards in the absence of cellular phone coverage.

The third step of individual preparedness is to be informed. Know what kinds of disasters are likely to afflict your community. Have access to an emergency radio and television broadcasts. Familiarizing yourself with state and local emergency preparedness plans is also beneficial.

In recognition of September being National Emergency Preparedness Month, I have cosponsored a resolution commending all of those who work for and with the Department of Homeland Security and serve on the front lines-emergency response and law enforcement agents nation wide-who immediately dedicate their services in the event of an act of terrorism, a national disaster, or other emergency. These individuals so selflessly give of themselves when our nation needs them most.

Be it a hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake, an act of terrorism, or any unforeseen emergency, just three simple steps can give us the surety and peace of mind to know that we have the tools in place to deal the best we can with a national emergency. I encourage every resident of the Ninth Congressional District to recognize National Preparedness Month by preparing themselves for what we hope never happens.