

Ashford Hollow PIP Report – March 2012

by Page Williams

The March 2012 P.I.P. speaker was Misty Gunn with the Harris County Homeland Security speaking about emergency management and the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). We learned that Harris County's 1777 square miles have set a national record by receiving 35 presidential Declarations of Disaster. Between our weather, and the vulnerability of our Port and petrochemical industries as targets, we are subject to just about every possible disaster except earthquake and volcano.

Ms. Gunn was experienced in running evacuation shelters, and warned that we should expect nothing more than a cot and a blanket if we go to one. Noting that wildfires can spread at 60 miles an hour, she advised that we could be ordered to evacuate with only five minutes of notice and stressed the importance of preparation with four steps:

1) HAVE A KIT. Include a 3-5 day supply of essentials, such as water, nonperishable food, change of clothing, medicines, toiletries, and copies of important papers. Don't forget nonelectronic entertainment for kids, and crates or leashes and food and water for pets. Have your kit portable, like a wheeled bin, and distinctly marked.

2) HAVE A PLAN. All family members should know and understand evacuation and communication routes. Agree on out-of-town and out-of state contacts, should local phone connections be jammed, so that family members can communicate. People who will need assistance evacuating need to notify the United Way by calling 211 and registering (and re-registering each year) well in advance of any emergency. While your cell phone charger can save your life, your generator can kill you. A generator that hasn't been used for a while need to be serviced well before it is needed - folks need to understand the safety rules about its use. If you are in evacuation zones, use main routes, where gas, water and food are available; if you are not, hunker down instead of jamming the roads.

3) STAY INFORMED. While 740AM, KTRH, is the official radio station for news and weather, all TV and radio stations are kept informed. Additional sources of information are readily available NOAA weather radios, and www.readyharris.org, www.stormpulse.com and www.wunderground.com.

4) BE INVOLVED. As only 1% of Harris County citizens are emergency responders, the other 99% of the public could be in need of help. A rewarding way to be involved is to become certified with the Community Emergency Response Team. This requires a free 8-week course, with a three-hour once-a-week class. The curriculum includes Preparedness, Fire Suppression, Medical Operations, Search and Rescue, Disaster Psychology and Organization, Terrorism, and Simulations. Schedules can be found at www.harriscountycitizencorps.com. By taking this training, you could be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, should disaster strike. Some P.I.P. attendees were certified, and reported it to be very rewarding.