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★ STAR

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County's emergency management gears up for upcoming hurricane season

By Cheryl Skinner

Officials say it isn't a matter of "if" it is a matter of "when" another major hurricane will hit the Texas Gulf Coast and local officials want to be prepared.

Fort Bend County's Division of Emergency Management is gearing up for the hurricane season, which officially begins on June 1.

In addition to participating in Hurricane Awareness Week, emergency management officials joined with the cities of Richmond, Rosenberg and Sugar Land to conduct a "mock" hurricane to help in preparing for a major hurricane should one strike the Gulf Coast this season.

The Governor's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM) and the National Weather Service

(NWS) designated May 15-21, 2005 as Hurricane Awareness Week and Fort Bend County Judge Bob Hebert issued a proclamation as did the cities of Kendleton, Missouri City, Rosenberg, Simonton, and Sugar Land.

Hebert urges all local residents to start preparing early. "Although hurricane season officially begins June 1 and continues through November 30, and most hurricanes occur in August-October, Tropical Storm Allison reminded us all that hurricanes can occur early or late in the season," Hebert said.

In 2001, Tropical Storm Allison flooded the Texas Gulf Coast with 36 inches of rain and resulted in \$5 billion worth of damage becoming the most costly tropical storm in history—all in the first week of the hurricane season.

Emergency Management Coordinator, Jeff Braum, reiterated the need for preparedness. "Citizens can take three basic steps to prepare their families for the upcoming season — prepare an emergency supplies kit, make a plan for what you will do, and keep informed about hurricane and tropical storm forecasts," he stated.

Fort Bend County is also participating in and conducting hurricane evacuation plan meetings. Recently, staff attended one of several meetings the GDEM is hosting to develop shelter hubs away from the coast.

"We are meeting later in the month with our local law enforcement officials to make sure that any hurricane evacuation through Fort Bend County goes as smoothly as possible," Braum said.