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Fort Bend County rated 'advanced' in emergency management preparedness

By Cheryl Skinner

The new year started out positive for Fort Bend County with an announcement by The Governor's Division of Emergency Management issuing an assessment on Fort Bend County's compliance with State of Texas standards and deeming the county advanced in their level of preparedness.

The assessment is designed to ensure that common emergency functions are adequately addressed in local emergency planning. As a result of this assessment, Fort Bend County has met

all requirements for the "advanced level of preparedness" designation, said Jeff Braun, director of the county's Office of Emergency Management.

Emergency management planning is assessed by the state through review of certain legal documents, the basic emergency management plan and the functional annexes of the plan. All jurisdictions within Texas are expected to meet a basic standard; however, intermediate and advanced ratings are

See RATED, page 12

RATED

.....from page 5

attained when a jurisdiction complies with more stringent planning requirements. The "advanced" rating is the highest level of preparedness and indicates that the county has a greater capability to respond and manage emergencies and disasters.

County Judge Bob Hebert said he was pleased with the new rating from the State of Texas. In December 2003, at the time Jeff Braun was hired as the county's new emergency management coordinator, Hebert said a top priority for the coordinator is to ensure that the county achieve and maintain a generally high level of preparedness and continually work to improve the county's basic emergency plan. "I applaud the Office of Emergency Management in achieving this recognition," Hebert said. "While we must continue to improve through resource development and training, we are significantly better prepared for a county wide emergency than we were at the end of 2003."

Braun noted that the county's success in upgrading the county's preparedness level is attributed to the work of many, including the cooperative, collaborative input from first responders throughout the county. Braun added, "Danny Jan, the county's assistant coordinator, was the point person for making sure that the plan documents were completed in a manner that would meet the planning standards, and, at the same time, be practical for Fort Bend County." Braun also pointed out that many county departments assisted in the transformation of the plan, noting, in particular, that most ele-

ments of the plan were reviewed by Fort Bend County Attorney Bud Childers.

Braun agreed with the county judge's call for continued improvement. Preparedness standards do not

assess first responder resources or training. "While the residents of Fort Bend County are better served today, as a result of this recognition," Braun stated, "the Office of Emergency Management is committed to continuing our improve-

ment process for prevention, response and recovery planning. We will build on this accomplishment and work vigilantly to minimize the risks our residents could encounter, if disaster strikes."