

THE REGION: Emergency guidelines help people be survivors, not victims

Crisis plan to guide residents when disaster strikes

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

What started out as a checkup for Y2K readiness has turned into an emergency planning guidebook aimed at helping York Region residents cope with all kinds of crises.

The handbooks, which cost \$75,000 to produce, will be delivered to all households in Tuesday's Metroland newspapers, including the *Markham Economist & Sun* and *Stouffville Tribune*.

According to regional chief administrator Alan Wells, the idea for the guide came when staff was preparing a strategy to deal with any problems that may surface when the clock strikes midnight Dec. 31.

Staff realized it made sense to make sure residents were also prepared to cope with emergencies. The guide tackles everything from how to use the 911 emergency number correctly to what steps to take during an evacuation.

"If you're unprepared for a disaster, it can shatter your life. If you are prepared, you can be a survivor — not a victim," the book advises.

"Victims believe that major disasters occur in someone else's neighbourhood. Victims don't plan for emergencies. So when disasters strike, victims are overwhelmed by stress, trauma and injury."

Tips include:

- Get prepared now by taking a first-aid course, preparing a three-day survival kit for your family, mapping an escape route out of your house and checking your insurance to make sure you are cov-

ered for possible risks in your community.

- Put a carbon monoxide detector in your house and be ready to recognize the symptoms of CO poisoning.

- In the event of a wide-scale disaster, listen to radio and television alerts.

- If you are forced to evacuate your house during a tornado, flood, earthquake or chemical spill turn off your power, water and gas. If you have time, leave a note in your mailbox saying when you left and where you're headed. If a shelter is established, register so you can be reunited with loved ones.

- Follow designated evacuations routes. Taking a short cut could lead you into a dangerous area.

- Prepare your home for winter storms. More people are killed by winter storms every year than by hurricanes, tornados, floods, lightning and extreme heat combined.

- There's a lot of stress for both adults and children when coping with a disaster. Emotional and physical reactions can include rapid heart beat, difficulty breathing, chills or sweating, vomiting, anxiety, fear, guilt, anger, nightmares and reluctance to abandon property.

The guidebook is intended to make sure residents plan now for potential emergencies so they survive a crisis.

"Survivors expect the unexpected and plan for it. They know what to do in a crisis. When disaster strikes, survivors are in better control and get back on their feet quickly."



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