



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
Hon. Harry J. Tutunjian
mayorsoffice@troyny.gov

518.270.4401
fax 518.270.4609
www.troyny.gov

GET “READY”

A column by Mayor Harry Tutunjian

It was December 2008 and what one organization called “the worst ice storm in two decades” had descended upon the city. In its aftermath, thousands of city residents, including the elderly and low-income, were left without power amid freezing temperatures. Due to the size of area affected, National Grid could not say when electricity would be restored in the city. Together with the County’s Bureau of Public Safety and the American Red Cross, we planned and put into action the steps necessary to evacuate seniors and other residents to emergency shelters. Because we were ready to respond, lives might’ve been saved.

September is National Preparedness month and I am proud to join the more than 3,200 other organizations that participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s month long “Ready Campaign” highlighting emergency preparedness. During this month, citizens are encouraged to learn more about what it takes to have a plan in place and what supplies should be immediately accessible in the event that disaster strikes, like an ice storm and flooding. Furthermore, as we once again observe in remembrance the tragedy of September 11th, it is a solemn reminder that these events – both natural and caused by humans – not only can happen but can strike at home.

On Tuesday, the city is sponsoring a “Blood Drive and Preparedness Expo” at Franklin Plaza in downtown Troy. City residents and people who work or travel downtown can donate blood and get information on how to prepare themselves and their families in the event an emergency occurs. Among the organizations participating will be: the State Emergency Management Office, the New York State Police, the American Red Cross, the United Way of the Greater Capital Region, the Hudson/Mohawk Humane Society, the Rensselaer County Bureau of Public Safety and also the County Health Department.

It is an oft stated fact that blood donors are always needed. In fact, according to the American Red Cross only 3% of the eligible donors nationwide participate. Area hospitals rely on this supply of blood not only for their routine medical procedures but in the event of critical mass event it will be one of the most important supplies. We have coupled this information expo with a blood drive because I believe having an event that not only informed people of preparedness but also allowed them to voluntarily donate really drives the point home. However, you do not have to donate in order to learn more about keeping your family safe and prepared.

According to the website, the Ready Campaign asks individuals to do four key things: get an Emergency Supply Kit that includes at least one gallon of water per person per day for three days, among other things. Next, develop a Family Emergency Plan to identify meeting places or other ways to communication; you can use a template that is available on their website at ready.gov. Third, be informed about reacting in an appropriate way, such as a fire versus an earthquake. The fourth tenet of emergency preparedness is to be an active

volunteer and participant in local relief organizations. As a citizen armed with the right materials, you can benefit your neighborhood or community by being a conduit for information.

Information is power. It is also the single most critical tool in times of emergency that could separate you from safety or disaster. Please join me and other local officials on Tuesday in a show of community support for being ready and prepared and visit ready.gov or call 1-800-BE-READY to find out additional ways you can get involved.

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