

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE



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**Suffolk County Must Learn the Lesson of New Orleans: Be Prepared
By Steve Stern, Suffolk County Legislator (16th L.D.)**



*Legislator Stern meets with Joe Williams,
Commissioner of FRES*



*Legislator Stern in New Orleans after
the devastation of Hurricane Katrina*

The fourth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina reminds us of the devastation that a hurricane can cause, particularly if we are not properly prepared. Many meteorologists believe that Long Island is overdue for a major storm and that most of us are not prepared for the inevitable.

As a graduate of Tulane University, I have deep personal ties to New Orleans. I met my wife Meredith there and have many friends who continue to live in the Crescent City. After Katrina, I returned to personally assist in hurricane relief efforts and witnessed first-hand the incredible devastation left by the storm and the failure of the levees. Unfortunately, now, even after four years, much of New Orleans still lies in ruin and many of its residents remain exiled from their homes and their beloved city.

Long Island faces different logistic challenges than New Orleans. However, it is important for us not to become complacent and for every one of us to take the time to prepare for the possibility of a storm that may leave us without electrical power for a significant period of time and may damage homes, business, schools and

make travel off of Long Island difficult, if not impossible. As an island, obviously we are subject to storm surges, flooding, severe erosion and resultant property damage. Even those living in central portions of Long Island must prepare for possible wind and flood-water damage.

We all can recall the scenes of disabled and elderly residents trapped in the rising floodwaters in New Orleans and we all certainly hope never to witness such tragedy again. As the Chairman of the Veterans and Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature, I held a hearing on Suffolk County's plans to evacuate the elderly and those with special needs in the event of an emergency. Suffolk County residents should know that the Suffolk County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services (FRES) has established a Joint Emergency Evacuation Plan (J.E.E.P.) for persons with special needs. Individuals are encouraged to obtain a J.E.E.P. application by calling FRES at 852-4900 or the County Office for Handicapped Services at 853-8333. If a person meets the criteria, assistance will be provided to evacuate that person to special needs locations which have been planned at Suffolk County Community College campuses and at the John Foley Skilled Nursing Facility in Yaphank. If you utilize life support equipment, you should contact LIPA to confirm that you are on the life support listing.

We all need to be prepared. Have a plan to reach family members and have a meeting place. Locate and secure important papers. Take needed medications with you and keep a list of all medications taken and the names of the physicians who prescribed them in the event you need to get medications from a distant location. Make plans in advance to ensure safety of pets.

If a storm is forecast for your area and you are able to leave in advance of the storm, take only necessary items with you. Turn off gas, electricity and water. Disconnect appliances. Make sure that you have a full tank of gas and a car emergency kit. Tie down or place indoors items that might become projectiles in a storm, such as toys, outdoor furniture, grills and bicycles. Cover windows and doors with plywood.

Have essential supplies ready. Keep a gallon of water per day per person for at least 3-5 days. Have a first aid kit and manual. Have battery-operated radios, flashlights and extra batteries on hand. Keep personal hygiene items dry and available. Have a supply of canned and dry foods that do not require cooking and have a manual can opener.

If evacuation is not possible, listen to radio reports for updates and advisories. Stay indoors even if the weather appears to have improved. There is a calm when the "eye" of a hurricane is over the area, but the winds from the back end of the storm are often more severe than the initial winds. Have a generator and fuel to power the generator, but please do not operate the generator indoors. Have a pump in the event there is basement flooding.

I pray that when I next return to New Orleans, I see a city well on the road to recovery. It is also my hope that we on Long Island never have to face such a disaster. Many residents of New Orleans would later say that they had not been adequately prepared for such a catastrophic storm and had no emergency plans in place. We must learn the important lesson of New Orleans: Preparedness is the key to protecting yourself and your family.