

SEVERE WEATHER GUIDE

The Editor's Pen —

Disaster planning starts at home

By Anthony Campbell
The Marshall County Emergency Management Agency encourages all families to have a disaster preparedness plan.



It doesn't have to be an elaborate plan. You just need to know what you will do, particularly if your area goes under a tornado warning. If a disaster hits, there's a pretty good chance you may be on your own for awhile.

The lessons of April 27, 2011, when a series of tornadoes hit our county,

are still very much in the minds of my family. The storm didn't hit our home, but we were without power for a week. That's probably the biggest thing people need to be ready for in our area.

When the potential for tornadoes was announced days ahead of time last week, our family sprang into action.

I went by the bank and got some cash. If the power is out for an extended period of time, you can forget using your ATM. Cash is king. I well remember that from 2011.

After school Friday, my wife Mary stopped by the grocery store and bought provisions for the weekend. She got enough to see us through for 3 or 4 days. The EMA's official guidance is to have sup-

plies on hand to be able to shelter in place for 3 days. Our local EMA officials will tell you it's even better to be prepared for 3 to 5 days.

I sent a text message to Mary and the kids as we got ready: Make sure you have at least a half tank of gas in your car, maybe more. When the power goes down over a wide area, gas becomes a premium. I remember driving almost to Gadsden to get a tank full in 2011.

Mary grew up in the 1970s, when there was the famous "Super Outbreak," and she spent some rough, stormy nights in an old-timey dug out storm shelter in the side of a bank.

When we added onto our house many years ago, she insisted that we add a storm shelter. Our soil is

only 30 inches deep so we opted for a "safe room" in the corner of the garage.

It's nothing more than a concrete closet really, but it does provide some peace of mind. My son Kyle even got in on the storm preparations last weekend. He went and checked out the storm room, making sure the path to get to it was clear and it was ready to go.

The safe room is not a pleasant place to be, a comfy reinforced basement bunker would be much better, so we aren't in there very much. Kyle called for a broom to knock the spider webs down.

We had cash, food, gas in our cars and a safe place to go. Those are the basics of being prepared for a storm. We were blessed in

our part of Georgia Mountain that we didn't have to go to the safe room, but we were just minutes away from doing so when the tornado roared through Union Grove.

We do have to bolster our emergency communications a bit. We rely on cell phones and TV weather to track severe storms when they come into the county. We've got to add a NOAA weather radio to our communications system and sign up for the Everbridge alerts offered by EMA.

EMA officials will tell you that you need more than one way to get emergency alerts and last weekend's storms showed it. NOAA weather radio went down for awhile and EMA had to put out an advisory for people to

get alerts some other way. They recommended Everbridge.

Our preparations last weekend weren't in vain. The cash will still spend, the gas will still burn and going to the grocery store a little earlier than usual meant the weekly grocery bill wasn't quite as high.

For us, it was also an excellent drill for the upcoming spring tornado season. The same preparations, albeit without preparing the safe room, are also the ones we'll take if a winter storm warning is issued.

There's lots of guidance on the Internet about making a personal disaster preparedness plan. If you haven't given the topic much thought, check them out and be prepared.

Tornado shelters and places of refuge

A tornado shelter is a shelter that is built to withstand 250 mile per hour winds. They are built to FEMA standards.

Below is a list of tornado shelters that are available to the public in Marshall County:

- 4059 Martling Rd., Albertville, by Martling Senior Center
- 22165 US Hwy 431, Guntersville, by Cedar Lodge Center
- 165 Hwy 168, Douglas, by Douglas Town Hall
- 2485 Georgia Mountain Rd., Guntersville, by Georgia Mountain VFD
- 307 2nd Ave. West, Grant, by Grant Recreation Center
- 21 1st Ave. West, Grant, by District 2 Shop
- 90 Hebron School Rd., Grant, by Hebron

- VFD
- 4373 US Hwy 231 North, behind Brindlee Mountain VFD
- 5743 Simpson Point Rd., Grant
- 7925 Nixon Chapel Rd., Horton, by Nixon Chapel VFD
- 7275 Section Line Rd., Albertville, by Pleasant Grove VFD
- 1345 Cha-La-Kea Rd., Guntersville, by Riverview Campground
- 3850 Eddy Scant Rd., Arab, by District 1 Shop
- 5120 Swaeringin Rd., Swaeringin, by Swaeringin VFD
- 3680 Union Grove Rd., Union Grove, by Union Grove Town Hall
- 777 South Sauty Rd., Langston, by Wakefield VFD
- 118 Whitesville Church Rd., Boaz, by Whitesville Baptist Church

There is room for 96 people in each shelter.

The shelters all have a no pets policy. If you have a service animal for a disability, they are allowed in the shelter. The service animal has to be a true service animal with tags. They do not allow weapons of any kind nor alcohol or illegal drug. There is absolutely no smoking in the shelters and no profanity. Only one small bag per person will be allowed inside the shelter. This bag should be able to sit comfortably in your lap. No large bags or suitcases are permitted. Each person in shelter is expected to conduct themselves in a manner that should not interfere or cause problems for other occupants. The shelter does not furnish water or snacks. Please note that if you are

in there for a long period of time, you may wish to bring your own snacks in your personal bag.

There are no restrooms in the facilities. There are locations near the shelter that will be open.

Places of Refuge

Places of refuge are not tornado shelters that are built to withstand 250 mile per hour winds. These places are facilities that have offered their location as a safer place to go to than a house or mobile home, such as the basement of a church. Some of these locations are not handicapped accessible. Some of these places allow pets. If you need to use one of these locations, contact them to make sure that they are still allowing pets in their facilities.

Below is a list of places

of refuge that are available in Marshall County along with their rules.

• Albertville Board of Education, 107 W. Main St., Albertville – pets allowed. Not handicap accessible. Basement. Will open under tornado watch.

• Boaz First Baptist Church, 225 S. Main St., Boaz – pets allowed, if caged or leashed. Handicap accessible. Partially underground. Will open under tornado watch.

• The Center on Broad, 709 S. Broad St., Albertville – pets allowed, if caged or leashed. Handicap accessible. Not underground. Tornado warning opens.

• St. William Catholic Church, 929 Gunter Ave., Guntersville – pets allowed, must be caged or leashed. Handicap accessible. Basement. Enter on

Debow Street. Tornado watch will open.

• Union Grove Senior Citizens Center, 3935 Union Grove Rd., Union Grove – pets allowed if caged or leashed. Basement. Handicap accessible. Opens when bad weather.

• Oak Grove United Methodist Church, Oak Grove Road, Horton – pets allowed if caged or leashed. Basement. Opens when weather gets bad.

• Hallmark Safe House (Arab Veterinary Hospital), 1536 Brindlee Mtn. Pkwy. Arab – pets allowed if crated, not handicap accessible. Will open when during bad weather.

When thunder roars, go indoors

After asking George Harwell, operations specialist of Marshall County EMA, to explain the dangers of lightning he simply stated, "When thunder roars, go indoors."

There have been lightning deaths in Marshall County before, most notably of a swimmer a few years ago at Honeycomb.

Harwell went on to explain that lightning is not something that should be taken lightly. If you hear thunder, you should go indoors and stay there until you have not heard any rumbles for at least 30 minutes.

If you hear thunder, find a safe shelter immediately. You should move from outdoors into a building or a car if possible. You should not seek shelter under a tree. Harwell said a tree conducts lightning and can carry the current through their roots.

Lightning is the leading cause of injury and death from weather-related hazards.



George Harwell explained that he was looking at the rain fall and lightning sticks. He showed that the different colors meant different storm events were happening. On this day, Alabama was in a light brown which means we had strong winds.

To prepare for a thunderstorm, you should know they can occur any time and any hour. You should not use a landline phone during a storm and you should unplug your

appliances if possible. Harwell highly recommends signing up for Everbridge and having a NOAA Weather Radio for emergency situations. You need to know the location of sturdy build-

ings, which includes near where you live, work or

play. You may want to consider buying surge protectors, lightning rods or a lightning protection system to protect appli-

ances, electronic devices and your home.

If you find yourself outside during a thunderstorm, go indoors. Find a sturdy building to go into. Pay attention to the weather reports and be

ready to make changes in plans if you need to seek a sturdier shelter.

If you are boating or swimming, you should get to land and find a sturdy, grounded shelter. That could be a vehicle or a sturdy shelter.

Harwell said if you cannot get to shore, you can take shelter under a bridge, but he does not recommend it if there is a possibility to get to land. Lightning can travel through water and even though the bridge is grounded, that does not mean it is safe.

You should avoid flooded roadways after a thunderstorm. Harwell said it is not worth your life to go through a roadway that has flooded, just turn around.

After the storm passes, you should listen to make sure it is safe and know where the safe areas are. If you notice fallen power lines or trees, you should report them immediately.

Thunderstorms always have lightning

According to the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL), thunderstorms are "a rain shower during which you hear thunder. Since thunder comes from lightning, all thunderstorms have lightning."

A severe thunderstorm can contain hail, wind gusts higher than 50 knots (57.5 mph) or a tor-

nado. It only has to have one of those characteristics to be considered a severe thunderstorm.

An interesting fact is that there are an estimated 16 million thunderstorms each year. There are roughly 2,000 thunderstorms going on as you read this article.

Thunderstorms are most likely to occur in the spring and summer months during the afternoon and evening hours,

but they can occur year-round and at all times. In the Gulf Coast area and southeastern states, thunderstorms are likely to occur in the afternoon while in the Plain states it will happen at night.

The Thunderstorm Life Cycle

Thunderstorms have three stages in their life cycle:

1. The developing stage
2. The mature stage
3. The dissipating stage.

The developing stage of a thunderstorm is started by a cumulus cloud that is being pushed upward. It is being pushed by a rising column of air which is called an updraft. The cumulus cloud then looks like a tower which is called towering cumulus. There is typically little to no rain during this stage, but there is occasional lightning.

The mature stage of a thunderstorm is when the updraft continues to feed the storm, but precipitation begins to fall out of the storm. This creates a downdraft which is a column of air pushing downward. When the downdraft and rain-cooled air spread out along the ground, it forms a gust front or a line of gusty winds. This is likely the time for hail, heavy rain, frequent lightning, strong

winds and tornadoes.

The dissipating stage occurs when a large amount of precipitation is produced and the updraft is overcome by the downdraft. At the ground, the gust front moves out a long distance from the storm and cuts off the warm moist air that was feeding the thunderstorm. This causes the rainfall to decrease, but lightning is still danger-



Get a tax break on your preparing

Alabama offers a "Severe Weather Sales Tax Holiday" every February where people can buy storm supplies without paying taxes.

In addition to the state sales, no local taxes are charged in municipalities that opt in on the holiday. Last year only the cities of Guntersville, Albertville, Arab and Boaz participated in this state sales tax, but this year all of Marshall County will partake in the event.

The sales tax holiday is always the last full weekend in February, which this year is Feb. 21-23. It begins at 12:01 a.m. on Feb. 21 and ends at midnight on Feb. 23.

Items under \$60 that are exempt during the tax-

free weekend include:

- AAA-cell batteries
- AA-cell batteries
- C-cell batteries
- D-cell batteries
- 6-volt batteries
- 9-volt batteries
- Cellular phone battery
- Cellular phone charger
- Portable self-powered or battery-powered radio, two-way radio, weather band radio or NOAA weather radio
- Portable self-powered light source, including battery-powered flashlights, lanterns or emergency glow sticks
- Tarpaulin
- Plastic sheeting
- Plastic drop cloths
- Other flexible, waterproof sheeting
- Ground anchor system, such as bungee cords or rope, or tie-down kit

- Duct tape
 - Plywood, window film or other materials specifically designed to protect window coverings
 - Non-electric food storage cooler or water storage container
 - Non-electric can opener
 - Artificial ice
 - Blue ice
 - Ice packs
 - Reusable ice
 - Self-contained first aid kit
 - Fire extinguisher
 - Smoke detector
 - Carbon monoxide detector
 - Gas or diesel fuel tank or container
- Additionally, generators under \$1,000 and extension cords are exempt during the holiday.

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EMA has a storage area with a lot of reading material on just about everything. Most of the material they have is in English and Spanish. There are several items that are for children as well.

Be prepared by reading information

Severe weather preparedness starts with having a personal plan for how you will take shelter and survive the immediate aftermath of a disaster, whether it's a tornado or a winter storm.

The Marshall County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) has the resources to help you in that regard. The EMA has several booklets, pamphlets and loose sheets of paper in reference to all kinds of preparedness situations. These loose sheets have a plethora of information. You can pick and choose which ones you want such as winter storm and NOAA Weather Radios.

One of the books that Operations Specialist George Harwell suggested was "Are You Ready? Emergency Preparedness Guide" which includes important information on disease control, natural

disasters, hazardous materials, injury prevention, food and water safety, and coping with disaster.

In this booklet, the section on natural disasters includes tornadoes, floods and storms.

Tornadoes

Tornadoes normally occur near the end of a thunderstorm and can vary in length of time. Typically a tornado lasts fewer than 10 minutes.

The EMA booklet discusses some of the dangers and threats caused by a tornado such as heavy rain and very high wind. A tornado can destroy structures and move vehicles with ease. There are some instances where hail is a factor with a tornado.

There are a few protective tips that you keep in mind while sheltering at home. Stay away from windows and go into an interior room on the lowest level of the home. If you are in a mobile home, find shelter some-

where else.

If you are outside, find shelter. If there is no shelter available, lie down in a ditch or a low-lying area near a strong building.

If you have a helmet, it is recommended that you wear one. Head injuries are the most common cause of death during a tornado. Helmets should not be considered as an alternative way of seeking shelter. You should always seek appropriate shelter.

Floods

Flooding is a temporary overflow of water onto land that is normally dry and is one of the most common natural distastes in the United States. Floods can come with no warning at all and can cause all kinds of damage.

The biggest thing to keep in mind when encountering a road that has flooded is "turn around, don't drown." It is important to know that just

six inches of moving water can knock you down and one foot can sweep your vehicle away.

Thunderstorms & Lightning

Lightning is the leading cause of injury and death from weather-related hazards in the U.S. and although a lot of lightning victims survive, they often have long-term symptoms.

One of the main rules for lightning is if you hear thunder, go indoors. It is not safe to stay outside.

There are a lot more ideas in these booklets, but these are the three main factors we deal with the most in Marshall County. Remember to always stay weather aware and have multiple ways of receiving warnings.

Storm Stories — Tornadoes hit Preston two years apart

By Greg Franks

Two tornadoes left a horrific path of destruction in 2009 and 2011 on Preston Island on Highway 79-N between Scottsboro and Guntersville.

It was a day storm survivor Jim Lucas will never forget. Neither will the other families in the community. Jim's recollection of the events was totally frightening. Houses, boathouses, vehicles, trees and personal property were all damaged in the path of the tornadoes.

Jim said, "Electrical power was out for 1 to 3 weeks depending on what part of the area you lived in."

Jim's losses included two vehicles, a boathouse, carport, and severe damage to his home. Jim said, "Nothing like this has ever even came close to Preston Island in the 60 years since he I had

been in this area. The two tornadoes basically took almost the identical footpath."

It was early in the morning, Jim was watching television and heard the warning, "If you live in the Preston Island area, take cover immediately."

At that time, he went to the door and opened it and it was very calm at that moment. Within a minute all the chaos broke loose. He said, "It actually sounded like a freight train, just like how other people describe a tornado sound."

He remembered seeing wrought iron patio furniture blowing past his window like it was plastic, sounds of glass breaking, and sounds of trees toppling down on structures.

"It was a very scary situation," he said. "I was very fortunate I wasn't hurt along with others on the island that day."

He considers himself very blessed.



This tornado hit Preston Island is shown crossing the Tennessee River afterwards, where it hit South Sauty. Someone on Gunter Mountain made the photo and Jim Lucas provided it.

Watch vs. warning: What it means

The terms can be confusing, but they come up whenever there is severe weather.

What exactly is a watch vs. a warning?

These are what the terms mean according to the National Weather Service:

Tornado Watch: Be prepared. Tornadoes are possible in and near the watch area. Review and discuss your emergency plans and check supplies and your safe room.

Be ready to act quickly if a warning is issued or you suspect a tornado is approaching. Acting early helps to save lives.

Watches are issued by the Storm Prediction Center for counties where tornadoes may occur. The watch area is typically large, covering numerous counties or even states.

Tornado Warning:

Take Action. A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. There is imminent danger to life and property.

Move to an interior room on the lowest floor

of a sturdy building. Avoid windows.

If in a mobile home, a vehicle, or outdoors, move to the closest substantial shelter and protect yourself from flying debris.

Warnings are issued by your local forecast office. Warnings typically encompass a much smaller area (around the size of a city or small county) that may be impacted by a tornado identified by a forecaster on radar or by a trained spotter/law enforcement who is watching the storm.



Weather and Storm Outage Tips

1. Make sure you know where your flashlights are, and have them easily accessible.
2. You'll want to have extra batteries for your flashlights, just in case.
3. If you plan on using candles, have extra matches and lighters.
4. Plug your appliances into surge protectors.
5. Before the storm hits, completely charge all your devices, but unplug them during the storm.
6. If it's cold outside, have plenty of blankets and warm clothes available for layering.
7. Sign up for our text alerts for outage information.

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Disaster team ready for action

By Anthony Campbell
 For many years now, the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Team has been ready at a moment's notice to swing into action and bring hope to those hurting from natural disasters. The Marshall Baptist Association has a chapter and Al Reese, a retired NCIS investigator, is its leader. They've worked in the aftermath of tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and more. There are more than 100 churches in the Marshall Baptist Association. 23 of those churches provide 64 volunteers for the Disaster Relief Team, al-

though some members are more active than others. Retirees seem to make the best volunteers for the group since they have more time to give. "When word comes that we're needed, we do a call out to see who is available to go," Reese said. "We've served following some pretty big storms." There is some training involved. And there's equipment maintenance. The team has chainsaws, a skid steer and more, all housed in an enclosed utility trailer. Reese's wife Debbie is also part of the disaster team. They view it as mission work they can do together.

Very active members of the team include Kerry Mitchell, Steve Clements, Ken Pendergrass, Roger Collins, Ann German, Jamie Gore and others. The group typically deploys for a week at a time. In the past year, the Reeses were gone 4 weeks. There are so many different Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Teams from various places that one team rolls in as soon as another rolls out. "We worked a flood in Illinois," Reese said. They've been to Texas and to Adamsville, Tennessee, famous as the hometown of Walking Tall Sheriff Buford Pusser. They see all kinds of in-

teresting things, as you might imagine. "Remember the gravity wave we had several years ago?" Reese said. "Adamsville had something similar. They had an inland cyclone. It put down thousands and thousands of trees in the area. Shiloh Battlefield is not far from there and they had 4,500 trees down on the battlefield alone." The group stayed at the First Baptist Church of Adamsville while they worked there, which is typical of the ministry. While seeing disasters up close is an interesting part of the work, it's the reaching out to hurting people that appeals the

most to Reese and other members of the team. "The EMA typically puts out the call for us to go," Reese said. "We go in and triage it to see what we can do, where our services are most needed." The Southern Baptist Relief Team wears yellow shirts and they've become well known for the work they do. "They call us 'the yellow shirt army,'" Reese said. "We bring people hope," Reese said. "They've just had a tremendous loss and someone is there to help. That provides hope." They sometimes get the opportunity to share the gospel in the process. Reese views the work as

"being the hands and feet of Jesus" and he shares that when asked why he does what he does. He's had people he was helping break down and cry when they heard it. "It's a great blessing to be able to go and help others," Reese said. He's also had people tell them they themselves need to get back in church once he shares his message about how he is trying to show the love of Jesus. "We are called to be the physical embodiment of Jesus' love," Reese said.



No job is too big for the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Team. They got this giant tree out of this lady's yard. They work locally as well as across the country.



The Southern Baptist Disaster Team not only responds to physical needs after disasters. They try to meet spiritual needs as well. They are shown praying before beginning a day's work.



Deb Reese is a chaplain with the Disaster Relief Team. But she also knows how to run a chainsaw.



The Baptist Disaster Relief Team is shown doing tree cleanup in Marianna, Florida.



Disaster Relief Team members are shown tarping a roof in Texas.



Al Reese of South Sauty has been the leader of the Marshall Baptist Association's Disaster Response Team for 7 years. He is shown in front of a grounded boat in Staten Island, New York, after a hurricane hit that community.



The Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Team is completely self-contained. They have large mobile kitchens for feeding their own crews and the community if necessary.

Their specialty comes after storm

By Anthony Campbell
What do you do after a storm has hit your home?

Andy Alsbrook of Guntersville knows a thing or two about that. For 30 years or so, restoration after tornadoes, fires and other disasters has been his specialty. He owns First Quality Homes, with a shop based in the Polecat Hollow area near East Lake.

Alsbrook started out simply in the remodeling business like other contractors. But he did a claims job or two for insurance companies and found his niche in the mitigation and restoration business.

In recent years, another restoration specialist, Tim Sims, has joined him in his business. Sims worked for another company that specialized in storm mitigation after disasters and the men had gotten to know each other through their work.

If a tornado or some other disaster damages your home, you should take immediate steps to prevent further damage, Alsbrook said.

“Document everything you do,” he said, which isn’t difficult given that everyone’s smart phone has a camera these days.

“If a storm puts a tree through your roof, you need to get it off as quickly as you can and get it tarped off to prevent more damage,” Alsbrook said. “You have a responsibility to protect your property.”

Water pouring into a home from a hole in the roof can make future repairs much more costly and difficult by creating additional

structural damage.

Alsbrook said his company is different in that they not only do mitigation after storms, but they make the final repairs as well. Sims said that makes their mitigation work a little different.

“We take it apart with an eye to how we will put it back together later,” he said.

First Quality has employees as well as a network of contractors to help as it puts damaged homes back together. But it’s all done under the close supervision of either Alsbrook or Sims.

It’s not unusual for them to have a dozen or more jobs going at any one time even if there hasn’t been a disastrous weather event.

“When I first got in the business, I wondered how we’d ever stay busy enough,” Sims said.

But something is always happening to someone. It’s not just home fires. Water leaks are a big item for them as well.

“Someone goes on vacation and they come back to find a pipe has been leaking the whole time they were gone and water runs out the door when they open it,” Sims said.

He has personally seen it so many times himself that it changed the way he prepares to go on vacation. He flips the breaker off on his hot water heater and shuts off the plumbing when he goes out of town nowadays.

In April of 2011 after the big tornado outbreak in Marshall County, First Quality was on site at 42 different damaged homes in the first 2 days after the storm. First Quality ended up doing the final repairs on 35 of the 42.



Tim Sims and Andy Alsbrook of First Quality Homes specialize in mitigation and then restoration after fires, tornadoes, water leaks and other disasters. The van behind them is for nothing more than pumping water out of a building and was quite expensive. “You don’t use it all the time, but when you need it, you need it,” Andy said.

“We did repair jobs ranging from less than \$10,000 to more than \$250,000,” Alsbrook said.

Alsbrook made a list as calls came in and told his customers that he would make all necessary temporary repairs to secure their property and that he would work to complete all jobs as quickly as he could, but that he understood if they chose to try and find a contractor to start their final repairs without delay.

Calls continued to come in for months after the storm.

When a tornado went through the High Point area last year, First Quality got 3 jobs. They even built back some pole barns that were destroyed.

Alsbrook, now 65, says Sims is his “succession plan.” But he admits he likes working and has no plans on retiring anytime soon.

Other restoration companies have come in over the years and tried to replicate what he does. None have lasted.

“It bothered me at first and more will be coming in and starting up,” Alsbrook

said. “It doesn’t bother me anymore.”

The demands of the job might be what keeps others from staying with it. Alsbrook and Sims are almost like first responders. They go when called. Their business phone rings in to one of their cell phones after hours and on weekends. It’s definitely not a 9 to 5 job.

Sims was with the other company when the Courthouse basement filled with water during the Christmas flood of 2015. He stayed with that job keeping the basement pumped out for 3

days. “They had records and things in the basement that could not get wet,” Sims said.

In the early days Alsbrooks’ coverage area for First Quality was as far south as Birmingham and as far north as Harvest. Currently Alsbrook tries to stay closer to home, but says he will still travel for his long-time customers if they have needs that arise in other areas.

The work is a niche he has enjoyed filling.

Red Cross active in disasters

By Anthony Campbell
For the last two years, Dan Aughinbaugh has been the volunteer community leader for the Red Cross in Marshall County.

The Red Cross is one of the county’s most active volunteer organizations. They respond to fires and offer assistance to families displaced by the fires. They’re often on the scene of a fire before the firemen have even left.

Dan is assisted in the work by his wife Teresa.

“I retired in 2017 from Redstone Arsenal,” Dan said. “I felt like I needed to do something. I went to the Huntsville office of the Red Cross and told them I’d like to work with the Red Cross in Marshall County. They made me the community volunteer lead-



**Dan Aughinbaugh
Red Cross**

The Red Cross has a team of volunteers in Marshall County, but they could always use more, Dan said. There is some training required of volunteers, but you can do that online or at the Huntsville Red Cross.

The team approach for Dan and Teresa has worked really well in responding to home fires.

“I fill out the necessary paperwork to get them assistance while Teresa loves on them,” Dan said.

They take stuffed animals with them to give to children affected by the fire.

“If you think about it, they’ve just watched all their worldly possessions be destroyed,” Dan said. “That stuffed animal can be a huge comfort to them at that time.”

Even if a family has insurance, there are some immediate needs that must be met, especially for fires that happen in the middle of the night. The Red Cross often provides hotel lodging for a night or two as well as a prepaid card for clothing for families that might have lost everything except the clothes on their backs.

“What we try to give them is hope,” Dan said.

“They’ve just seen everything they own go up in smoke.”

After tornadoes, the Red Cross works closely with the EMA in offering assistance to families affected by the disaster.

“It used to be that people affected by a disaster had to answer questions for 3 different groups, the EMA, Red Cross and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Team. Now we all go in to assess needs together so they just have to answer those questions one time,” Dan said.

In a large, widespread disaster, Dan has broader resources he can call on from the Red Cross organization at large.

He said the work has been a blessing to him. Although the Red Cross is not officially a religious organization, Dan is a spiritual person, attends the

Guntersville First Methodist Church and views the work as something of a ministry.

If he can’t meet a person’s needs himself, he knows of other organizations he can call on.

“Marshall County is such a great place,” he said. “There are so many folks who want to help others. We can refer our clients to other organizations such as the United Way. We could not do what we do without United Way.”

From July of 2018 to June of 2019, the last full reporting period for the Red Cross, the Marshall County Red Cross responded to 57 families affected by fire.

“We also installed 36 smoke detectors,” Dan said. “That’s something we do as well. And we trained 621 people in first aid and how to use an AED.”

The Red Cross offered services to 102 families of the armed forces in Marshall County during that same time period.

Like others, the Red Cross has an educational component urging people to be prepared for storms and other disasters.

“Be Red Cross Ready is our slogan,” Dan said. “We encourage people to make a plan and to stay informed.”

You can find Red Cross personal preparedness resources online at redcross.org.

“There’s a checklist you can access to see how prepared you are,” Dan said.

He encourages people to support the Red Cross financially.

“91 cents of every \$1 goes directly to assist clients,” Dan said.

Register your storm shelter with EMA

The Guntersville Fire Department partners with Emergency Management Agencies (EMA) on the location of all the registered storm shelters/safe rooms in Guntersville. If one receives the information, they share it with the other.

If you have a storm shelter/safe room and have not registered it, contact Guntersville Fire or EMA. It is helpful in the case of a disaster to know where these areas are for possible rescue. Fire Marshall Buddy Pettry said it would be up-to-date on their map in the event of a tornado coming through an area and knowing where people may be. He explained that they would be able to go place to place to ensure everyone is all right or to rescue those who may be trapped.

Will Kennamer, Geographic Information Systems Planner at EMA, said there are approximately 200 storm shelters on their

map. If you have had one installed and not been registered, feel free to call EMA or the fire department with your information.

Another recommendation is to have provisions. You should have water and meals for a few days as a “just in case.” Deputy Chief Brian Walls said people need to have an emergency kit regardless if they have a safe room or not. He advises having a flashlight, bottles of water, food and other necessities. One item that is highly recommended is medicines. If you take a daily medication especially one your body requires, you should have a few days stored in your kit. That includes pets. If you are on oxygen, if possible, make sure you have extra canisters.

Petry and Walls remembered the April 2011 tornadoes and having to get oxygen to some people who were at Gunters Landing. Walls was not in that area, but he remembers hearing

the story. They were able to rescue them and take them out of that situation.

Walls has a family member who is on oxygen and he believes he has a couple canisters for travel, but that would run out quickly if the power was out for a prolonged period of time. If you can, a generator would be a good purchase.

In your home during a tornado, you should be in the center part of the home. The room should be an interior room such as a closet or hallway. You should have protection on you as well. It is recommended that you wear a helmet to protect your head.

Petry said to have your safety shelter chosen and don’t wait until it is too late to leave if you need to vacate your home. If you live in a mobile home, you should have a safe place to go. You should never stay in a mobile home during a time of tornadoes.

Sleeping on the couch saved a life

By Mary Bailey

For many of us, sleeping on the couch might be some form of punishment or maybe even a place of rest on a sleepy Sunday afternoon.

But for Destin Huynh, who remembers the tornado season of April 2011, her being on the couch is what probably saved her life.

“I never heard sirens,” she recalled. “I had just woken up and was about to get ready for classes and my best friend called me and told me a tornado was heading my way.”

Huynh said she wasn’t in her room, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

“I had been asleep on the couch and my brother was asleep on the air mattress in the floor beside the couch,” she continued. “I woke him

up, grabbed our dog, then we took off to the closet. As soon as we shut the door, you could hear an awful noise outside.”

Luckily, Huynh, her brother and dog all survived the tornado that came through Guntersville that April afternoon but their house was damaged beyond repair and they ended up moving.

“It was crazy. We had several trees fall down on top of our house,” she said. “A tree was actually sitting in my dad’s room. Luckily, he had already left for work.”

As for Huynh’s room and why she was so thankful for her couch slumber?

“A tree came through the skylight in my room, right above my bed,” she said.

Huynh is now married, and busy planning the birthday par-

ty of her two-year-old daughter and is very thankful she survived that horrific afternoon. She is also much more cautious when the forecast predicts dangerous weather.

“Sirens are good, but don’t depend on just them,” Huynh says. “Always have another way to stay alert and stay safe.”

The 2011 “Super Outbreak” was the largest, costliest, and one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks ever recorded, taking place along the Southern, Midwestern and Northeastern United States.

On April 27, 2011, 55 tornadoes hit the state of Alabama.

Questions, answers on severe weather

By Anthony Campbell
Got questions about how to prepare for severe weather? The Marshall County Emergency Management Agency has answers.

Will Kennamer is the geographic information systems specialist and planner with the EMA and George Harwell the operations specialist.

We asked them a series of questions on how to prepare for bad weather.

These were their answers:

Q: We haven't really had much winter weather lately. What do people need to consider in preparing for winter weather?

Will: "Your winter preparedness is not unlike your severe weather preparedness in terms of food, medicine and getting by for awhile without power. The thing you have to consider is heat. You need to know how you're going to heat your home if the power goes out. How quickly will your house get cold? Do you need to go to the building supply store and get some more bats of insulation to throw in the attic? My wife Jana and I were living in an apartment during the blizzard of 1993. The building wasn't insulated very well and it got cold fast. We put all the clothes we could on our son, who was just a baby. It took 3 days before someone could get up the hill to get us and take us to a relative's home."

Q: What is the outlook on winter weather this year?

Will: "The long-term outlook is for a more normal cycle. But it has been a very wet winter so far.

We're really just getting into the winter season. Historically, some of our most significant winter weather has been in February."

Q: How do people need to prepare medically for severe weather?

Will: "If you take prescription medications, you want to have enough on hand. Ideally, it would be in your kit that you take with you when there's severe weather. For people who are on oxygen, severe weather is a big deal. How are you going to keep oxygen machines running? It usually comes down to having a generator."

Q: What types of communication plans do people need to have for severe weather?

Will: "The situation last Saturday with the poles and lines going down on Highway 227 shows the need for more than one way to get notification of severe weather. A major carrier had lines there. It messed with the phone system and even a little with the cellular system. TV and phones are one way to get alerts. You also want a NOAA weather radio and you should sign up for the Everbridge alert system. The important thing to remember about the NOAA weather radio is that you have to change the batteries to make sure it continues to operate when the power is out. We get people all the time who say their weather radio isn't working but it's because they didn't change the batteries. Change the batteries every year when you change the batteries in your smoke detectors."

Q: Pets aren't allowed in the community storm shelters. What should people do with pets if



Will Kennamer is shown in the "situation room" at the Marshall County Emergency Management Agency center on Creek Path Road.

they're leaving their home to go to a shelter.

Will: "That's a great question and there's not an easy answer. If your pet is an outdoor pet, I think you should leave it outdoors at home. If it's an indoor pet, make sure it's in an interior area of the home and leave it there."

Q: It seems like there are tracks that tornadoes follow. They come through Joppa, Arab and Union Grove and then on to Hebron. There also seems to be a track they follow on Sand Mountain.

George: "I don't think there are tracks through certain communities. But most of these storms come into our area from the southwest. They come through Cullman County and then into Marshall County. If you really want an early warning,

program your weather radio to go off when Cullman County goes under a warning. What's happening in Cullman County usually tracks northeast into Marshall County."

Q: With all the other warning methods today, it seems like the outdoor siren is antiquated. Will we see them go away?

George: "Some communities are doing away with outdoor warning sirens in other places. That is not in our plans at this time. We have 2 sirens that are down right now, but they are scheduled for maintenance. When one of our sirens is down, we schedule repairs to get it back up and running."

Q: How does Marshall County rank in terms of tornado activity?

George: "A map re-

cently came out showing, I believe, all the tornadoes since 1950 and naming the top 10 counties in the state for tornadoes. Marshall County ranked No. 7. An important thing to remember is that lots of people get geared up for the 'tornado season' of April and May. But tornadoes can happen any month of the year."

Q: If someone wanted to put a storm room in their home, how should they go about it?

George: "FEMA has that document on that, detailing the exact specifications. A tornado shelter is built to withstand 250 mile per hour winds. It can be a very sophisticated system and I'm not sure it's a do-it-yourself project. We have a list of 2 dozen or so suppliers of

storm rooms."

Q: Is there any other information to share with the people of Marshall County about storm preparedness.

Will: "Ideally, the whole family should sit down and talk about this topic. It's good to write out your plan. But you need to go a step further. Assign everyone a job, including the kids. You grab the dog, you grab the cat and we're going to the shelter. You need to practice the plan. Will the entire family fit in that close? Run through it a few times so everyone knows exactly what you will do in an actual emergency."

Stay safe during all types of emergency events

Your safety is our top concern. That's why Marshall County EMA wants to make sure you know about emergencies and incidents as they happen. By opting into the "ALERT MARSHALL COUNTY" emergency notification system you'll be informed before, during, and after incidents that could impact your safety.

The "ALERT MARSHALL COUNTY" emergency notification system, powered by Everbridge, will allow us to send you messages about weather situations as they happen across multiple devices, including your home phone, mobile device, email, and more.

For this system to be a success, we need your contact information so we can reach you in the event of an

HOW TO REGISTER:

Online - www.marshallcoema.org

Mail - Complete the form below and mail to: Marshall County EMA
3550 Creek Path Road
Guntersville, Alabama 35976

Powered by everbridge

Name _____

Home Phone _____ Mobile Phone _____ Business Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip Code _____

Email _____

SIGN UP FOR ALERTS. The Everbridge alert system can give you storm alerts on your computer, cell phone or your landline phone. The best way to sign up for the alerts is to go online. But you can fill out this form and mail it in to get in the system too. Everbridge alerts are a free service offered to the public by the Marshall County EMA.

Marshall County Gas District knows the importance of everyone being aware and knowing what to do in case of a natural gas emergency and especially during severe weather. MCGD wants to prepare customers and non-customers with the following natural gas safety tips:

Detecting Gas Leaks
If you smell a rotten egg odor that is often associated with natural gas, you should immediately leave the affected area; and call our 24-hour emergency line at 1-800-552-1382. If the natural gas odor is present do not use a telephone or cellular phone, turn light switches on or off, or operate any appliance, garage door opener or do anything that might cause a spark, such as lighting a match.

Damage Prevention and Natural Gas Safety
Strong winds and saturated grounds could cause trees to become uprooted. Before removing downed trees, you should call Alabama 811 by dialing 811 to have the location of utility lines marked. If a MCGD natural gas meter is damaged or gas line is exposed and leaking, immediately leave the area; and call our emergency line.

As your natural gas provider, MCGD is committed to maintaining the highest safety standard possible. Please take all severe weather warnings seriously and plan ahead.

Marshall County Gas District • Albertville, Arab & Guntersville

Office Hours: Monday-Friday 7:30am-4:30pm • Emergency Line: 1-800-552-1382

Albertville **256.878.4591**
Arab **256.586.8303**
Guntersville **256.582.5641**

Toll Free **1.800.552.1382**
Your Natural Gas Company For 67 Years

Have Your Severe Weather Plan Ready This Season!

The Guntersville Fire Department is always weather aware and will be ready to respond should severe weather impact the area.

1745 Blount Ave, Guntersville
256-571-7575