Op-Ed

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Be a Force of Nature in Your Hometown
National Severe Weather Preparedness Week March 2-8, 2014

Severe weather could happen anytime. In May 2013, tornadoes devastated part of central Oklahoma. This outbreak included the deadliest tornado of the year on May 19 in Moore, Oklahoma. In just one month, November 2013, at least 70 tornadoes spanned seven Midwestern states.

Each year, people suffer or are seriously injured by severe weather despite advance warning. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have partnered for the third year to highlight the importance of making severe weather preparedness a nationwide priority.

We all want the peace of mind of knowing that our families, friends, homes and our businesses are safe and protected from threats of any kind. And while we can't control where or when the next disaster will hit, we can take action by preparing ourselves and loved ones for emergencies and learning what actions to take.

Knowing your risk, taking action and being an example are just a few steps you could take to be better prepared to save your life and others.

Know your risk: The first step to becoming weather-ready is to understand the type of hazardous weather that can affect where you live and work, and how the weather could impact you and your family. During active weather, stay alert of the forecast by listening to radio or television, check the weather forecast regularly on weather.gov, obtain a NOAA Weather Radio and listen for Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) on your cell phone. Severe weather comes in many forms and your shelter plan should include all types of local hazards.

Take action: Develop an emergency plan based on your local weather hazards and practice how and where to take shelter before a severe weather event. Post your plan in your home where visitors can see it. Learn how to strengthen your home and business against severe weather. Take action and participate in a local event on April 30 through America's PrepareAthon and ensure you know what to do when severe weather occurs

Be a Force of Nature: Once you have taken action, tell your family, friends, school staff and co-workers about how they can prepare. Share the resources and alert systems you discovered through your social media network. Studies show that individuals need to receive messages a number of ways before acting – be one of those sources.

Learn more at www.weather.gov and www.ready.gov/severe-weather or the Spanish-language web site www.listo.gov. Follow the National Weather Service @nws and FEMA @readygov.