

Knowing what to do when things go wrong

Duxbury firefighters give presentation on emergency preparation at the Senior Center

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CLIPPER REPORTER

The latest installment of the Senior Safety Series, "Disaster Preparedness Starts With You" was held Feb. 21 at the Senior Center. Duxbury Fire Department Captain/Paramedic Rob Reardon and Duxbury Firefighter/Paramedic Kristen Piper led the presentation, and while it was geared toward older adults, the information they relayed is universal and applicable to everyone.

Reardon said planning ahead in the event of a major storm or natural disaster eases stress and anxiety and allows the Fire Department to do its job effectively and efficiently. Knowing what to do may seem simple, but as snow, wind and rainstorms become more frequent and dangerous, it's important to keep your-self safe.

Reardon's first tip is to be proactive with your heat. He suggests turning it up in order to get a couple hours of warmth should the power go out. The Senior Center is the town's warming center, where people can go to, among other things, charge a cell phone. He added it isn't a shelter, so pets aren't allowed, but they are allowed in the regular shelters in Marshfield and Plymouth. Be mindful, Reardon said, that your pets may have to be crated at the shelter.

He stressed the importance of knowing evacuation routes, not just on the roads, but inside the home should it be necessary to get out in the pitch dark. He also said to have important documents such as passport, license, and a list of your medications and doses at the ready. Piper added people should alert loved ones and neighbors of their plans so they know how to make contact.

She also went over the disaster kit, and said it's important to stock enough water and perishable food to last 72 hours. The kit should include extra batteries purchased well in advance of the storm to power flashlights, handheld radios and flameless candles, which she said are an excellent alternative that give off a lot of light safely. Hand sanitizer is important for shelters since one doesn't know what they might encounter, and she also said to keep cash handy in the event debt and credit card

machines don't work without electricity.

The go kit, she says, is similar to the disaster kit, but it should be portable to easily take it with you. The kit, she said, should include the items listed above, but also include bedding and whatever is needed to feel comfortable in a shelter. She said to maintain keep the kit updated every six months by switching out expired food and medication and making sure the emergency documents are up-to-date.

It's important to remember, Reardon said, that when the power goes out, "you lose phones right away." As he explained, the town has transitioned from copper phone lines to fiber optic, which runs on a battery pack connected to modem or router. He said the batteries are sold separately, and when he inquired through his provider, Comcast, they would sell him one for \$75. Reardon suggests, as a much cheaper alternative, buying a surge protector with a built-in battery pack.

He also discussed 911 and explained why it's such an important resource within the town. He said that dialing 911 from a cell phone connects it directly to the Duxbury Fire Department. It works, Reardon explained, through the phone's GPS, no matter what area code you have.

He went on to say that when 911 is dialed, the call is heard live through the speakers at the fire station, so they are able to respond very quickly. He went over the series of questions that will be asked, which begins with "where are you?" at which point they're looking for the exact street address, followed by what town the caller is in, since the dispatch center handles calls from four towns simultaneously. Reardon said there are at least one or two other people listening in on the call, so when they hear the location of the emergency, they're off and running.

Off and running means all emergency services, including a fire truck and an ambulance. Reardon explained why, in response to a question from the audience. With regards to the fire truck, it acts as the toolbox for the emergency and can easily be dispatched to other calls as needed. Piper said ambulances today are mini-

hospitals, with more than 70 drugs on board. Paramedics go through two years of extensive training where they learn, among other things, how to intubate a patient, deliver babies and administer the drugs at the proper dosage.

Calling 911 won't result in a bill, Reardon said, even if an ambulance was dispatched. He said they assist in helping people lift loved ones who have fallen, people who are locked out of their homes and people who have chirping smoke alarms, all the time. Those are all reasons, he said, to call. Another reason to call if you or a loved one is on oxygen, as they keep a list of those patients at the station and check-in during storms.

As Reardon pointed out, there are multiple ways to get messages to residents. First is through the town's telephone notification system, which is known as "Blackboard Connect and E-Alerts" and can be searched for easily on the town's website at www.town.duxbury.ma. These emergency phone notifications can come in the form of landline phone calls, emails and texting alerts. Reardon says it's important to

sign up for all three since if the phone system is down, it will still be possible to know what's going on. Emergency messages and alerts can also be found, as a banner, on the homepage of the town's website and on the radio, through 95.9 WATD-FM.

Another critical resource, Reardon stressed, is social

media. The Fire Department maintains social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. He said they participate in regional conference calls and get weather information that isn't on the local networks, so they don't hype storms like the meteorologists on television.

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For more information, please email LizT@bfarm.org.