Media Release

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March 26, 2015

“TEXT FIRST, TALK SECOND”
OFTEN BEST WAY TO CONTACT LOVED ONES
WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

During Severe Weather Preparedness Month, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) is encouraging people to develop a Family Communications Plan that includes the “Text First, Talk Second” concept. When disaster strikes, your first instinct probably is to call loved ones to make sure they’re okay or let them know you’re safe. It’s likely everyone else affected by the emergency is thinking the same thing. In these instances, telephone lines can quickly become overloaded, preventing not only your call from going through but also blocking critical 911 calls.

“Communicating with family and friends immediately after a disaster is important,” said IEMA Director James K. Joseph. “We’re encouraging people to plan now so they’ll know how to reach their contacts in the chaotic aftermath of a disaster.”

Joseph said short, simple text messages, such as “R U OK?” and “I’m OK,” are more likely to get through to your loved ones than a phone call when phone service is disrupted. As phone congestion eases, you can follow up with a phone call to relay more information.

Data-based services like texts and emails are less likely to experience network congestion during an emergency. You can also use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to post your status to let family and friends know you’re okay.

While Text-to-911 is on the horizon for emergency communications, it currently is available only in limited areas of the U.S. If you need to contact 911, do so by landline or cell phone unless your community has notified you that this service is activated in your area.

Additional emergency communication tips include:

- Keep all phone calls brief by conveying only vital information to emergency personnel and/or family.
- If you are unsuccessful in completing a call using your cell phone, wait 10 seconds before redialing to help reduce network congestion.
- If you lose power, you can charge your cell phone in your car. Be sure your car is in a well-ventilated place, not in a garage.
- Another resource for letting friends and family know your status after a disaster is the American Red Cross's Safe and Well Registry at safeandwell.communityos.org/cm/index.php.
- Your Communications Plan should identify an out-of-area contact and household members should carry that information with them at all times. If a disaster occurs when you are separated, it often is easier to call outside your immediate area. Family members can call the contact to provide location and coordinate reunification plans.

For more information about developing a Family Communications Plan, visit the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov.

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