



Below is an article detailing the recent hurricane preparedness meeting held at Magnolia Fire Department, Station 181. The article discusses the important collaboration between emergency response agencies throughout Magnolia and Montgomery County, including Montgomery County Emergency Services District No. 10 and Magnolia Fire Department, as they prepare for hurricane season.

Montgomery County Emergency Response Groups Meet to Plan for Hurricane Impacts

Montgomery County Emergency Services District No.10 (ESD No.10) and Magnolia Fire Department (MFD) hosted emergency response agencies from throughout Magnolia and Montgomery County to prepare for hurricane season. Magnolia Police Department (MPD) Chief Kyle Montgomery reached out to nine municipal organizations critical to protecting area residents and suggested they gather to review response plans, plans that might have changed due to COVID-19 impact on revenues, resources and health & safety protocols.

ESD No.10 Commissioners Larry Smith and Jeff Cunningham joined (MFD) Chief Jeff Hevey and members of MFD command staff to host the meeting. The meeting was held in ESD No.10 training room at MFD Fire Station 181, which would serve as a West Montgomery County Area Command Center should a hurricane impact the county.

“I wanted to gather all emergency response disciplines to discuss planning and resources to get ahead of the curve before any storm threat,” said MPD Chief Montgomery. “We have had changes in leadership of these groups. Each organization has been impacted or changed protocols to react to the pandemic. We need to understand how this might impact our hurricane response.”

Chief Hevey, who was appointed as MFD Chief in February 2021, is a tested emergency response leader who has been through natural disasters, including Hurricane Harvey.

“We have experience and lessons learned to help us plan our response,” Chief Hevey shared with his colleagues and response agency partners as he assured them that MFD is ready and that COVID-19 has not impacted resources needed to lead response efforts.

“We have been adding qualified personnel and will add more this year and next year as ESD No.10 assumes direct management of the Magnolia Fire Department,” Chief Hevey said. “We need to properly staff during storm emergencies to safely execute rescues. It is important that our emergency responders can get rest and nourishment, so we will work in 12-hour shifts.”

Chief Hevey used a recent swift water rescue performed by emergency responders from MFD recognized as “heroes” by ESD No.10 in June.

“They are well trained, have the proper equipment and saved a family of seven. Water rescues are dangerous and we must ensure we have enough qualified responders and the right equipment to save lives and protect property.”

Each of the response agencies detailed resources available from their organizations, including personnel, high-water rescue vehicles, boats, barricades and gates, as well as rescue shelters. Magnolia Independent School District (MISD) is a critical player in the response, providing buses to transport residents and opening the MISD Event Center as a hurricane shelter.

Also included in the hurricane prep meeting was Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), which has responsibility to close flooded roadways. TxDOT deploys staff to monitor closed roadways and adjust barricades as road and stream conditions evolve during a storm. Additional discussion ensued for the need to coordinate with social service and volunteer agencies, such as the Food Bank and Red Cross.

“The level of coordination is impressive,” said ESD No.10 Board President Larry Smith. “This coordination between emergency response partners meets ESD No.10’s mission to

protect property and save lives. We are committed to working with all of our response partners.”

A nod to the level of organization needed, Constable Chris Jones, Precinct 5 Constable’s Office, asked if the ESD No.10 training room would again be open as an emergency operation center (EOC) for the west side of the county. It would house critical organizations to more easily provide and share needed resources. ESD No.10 immediately accepted that request. The training room is designed as an EOC and can serve as an area command center to supplement the official Montgomery County EOC in Conroe. An additional advantage is Fire Station 181’s full-service mechanic shop, kitchen, sleeping quarters and phone bank adjacent to the training room.

Christopher Perkins, Senior Planner with Montgomery County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, offered to assist the organizations with effective and coordinated communication systems to be sure reliable communication is maintained throughout an event. Perkins has experience responding during Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Harvey and most recently with Montgomery County during Winter Storm Uri in February.

“We can use Winter Storm Uri as a dress rehearsal,” offered Perkins.

Participating municipal organizations invited were Montgomery County Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley’s office; Montgomery County ESD No.10; Magnolia Fire Dept.; Magnolia Police Dept.; Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office; Montgomery County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management; Montgomery Constable, Pct. 5; Montgomery County Independent School District; and Texas Department of Transportation.

ESD No.10 Commissioner Jeff Cunningham thanked MPD Chief Montgomery and MFD Chief Hevey for organizing the planning meeting and thanked all the emergency responders for their dedication. “I appreciate your planning for the response and the rescues. I am moved by the compassion and caring of all the emergency responders in this room and the organizations you represent, demonstrated by your planning to house, feed and care for our neighbors.”