

HRSA OWH Podcasts

“Be Ready” Community Preparedness: An Interview with the Citizens Corps Program

October 20, 2008

MARISSA RICE: Good day to all and welcome to the second podcast coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration, Office of Women's Health.

I'm Lieutenant Commander Marissa Rice, Public Health Analyst in the HRSA Office of Women's Health, which is under the direction of Dr. Sabrina Matoff-Stepp. The HRSA Office of Women's Health is responsible for disseminating information on topics that are important to women.

One of Homeland Security's key priorities is helping individuals and communities become better prepared to protect against or respond to emergencies. Through the National Ready Campaign and Senior Citizen Corps working with state and local government, Citizen Corps Councils and programs throughout the nation are working hard to strengthen our nation's security and increase our level of emergency preparedness.

The goal of this podcast is to provide the listener with an overview of how to be prepared in the event of an emergency. The speaker for this podcast today is

Penny Burke, who is the affiliate coordinator for the Citizens Corps program. And she's responsible for organizing 26 national organizations which are based on federal agencies that support the Citizen Corps at the federal, state and local level. So we thank you very much for your interest in this podcast today, and we will begin with some questions and answers with Penny Burke. So, Penny, thank you so much today for joining us.

Penny Burke: No problem.

MARISSA RICE: Yes, thank you so much. So the first question I have for you is: Why is it important for people to prepare?

Penny Burke: Well, you know, it's kind of -- I use this funny little anecdote, whenever I have this conversation about people being prepared. And have you ever seen a little television show called Wife Swap?

MARISSA RICE: Yes, I sure have.

Penny Burke: Well, on Wife Swap one time there was a family that was kind of from a rural part of the country, and they were very into being prepared, and to the brink of being a little bit on the point of being crazy. Like they would eat raw food and they were completely self-sustaining within their home and their ranch. And they were traded off with an urban couple who lived in San Francisco and

lived an urban lifestyle and it was very fancy and unlike the rural community and it had this whole interesting dynamic the entire time.

But I think the thing that stuck out to me during that time while I was watching the show was that the gentleman who is the husband in the urban San Francisco area said: You know, I live in an urban community, because this woman kept telling him he needed to be prepared.

And he said: I live in an urban community. I'm going to be fine. I'm going to be 100 percent fine. If something were to happen, someone can come to me. And all too many times that's instantly what people all over the country think, rural and urban alike. And it's just not really true and that's kind of the problem.

The statistics show that less than one percent of the U.S. population is a first responder. So one percent of the population is a first responder. That means for big urban epi centers, like San Francisco, DC, and in rural communities, that means that only one percent of the population can even come and help you. So that statistic is always pretty staggering to me.

MARISSA RICE: That is very interesting. That's kind of like saying 99 percent of us are not prepared.

Penny Burke: Exactly. And so when we look at events that have happened in our nation's history very recently, including 9/11, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and even the recent hurricanes that happened down in the Gulf coast, Ike and Gustav, preparedness is key in making sure that people are safe and able to properly take care of their families and their communities.

I think Katrina very much showed us how essential it is that being prepared is, because we saw so many people who were unprepared. We saw a state and local government not able to help people successfully. And I think that kind of highlights right there why people need to take personal responsibility in making sure that their families are safe.

So that's 100 percent why we go out and advocate for being prepared. Because although government is there to help, and we will try to help as much as we can, ultimately we have a population that's a lot bigger than government. And we want to make sure that they understand that preparedness really comes down to them.

MARISSA RICE: That is so true that you mentioned that. You know, usually in the context of getting prepared, we think of just terrorist attacks. A lot of times we don't think about everyday emergencies. We don't think about national hazards and even technological disasters. Can you elaborate a little bit more about those events?

Penny Burke: Sure. Here's some events we would prepare for. So like everyday emergencies. So if your office building needed to be evacuated quickly because there was a fire on one of the floors, would you know how to do that? That's an everyday emergency.

Or if someone in your office were to maybe get something lodged in their throat and be choking, would you know what to do? Even traffic jams are kind of everyday emergencies. If there's a significant traffic jam that holds up a certain part of town, would you know what to do, who to contact if you were going to be there for a while?

MARISSA RICE: Sure, any alternate routes that you might be able to take, especially in the age of technology where you have GPS systems. But not everyone has them. So, you're right, you would need to be prepared.

Penny Burke: Yeah, exactly. So if you're stuck in a situation for a while, how would you be prepared? That could be something like kind of rainstorms coming through can throw off an entire day if you're ill prepared for that.

Natural hazards are -- we tend to see them as more significant events than maybe a rainstorm. Maybe a tornado. A hurricane. Would you know what to do if you were stuck in a blizzard and you really couldn't leave your home? There's tons of events that are natural hazards. It depends on where you are in the

country, but there's everything from avalanches to dust storms lots of natural hazards that could greatly impact your life.

Terrorist attacks are probably one of the hardest ones to really truly be prepared for. They come so quickly and there's generally not a great alert or warning that can help keep you safe. But terrorist attacks, whether that be a bombing. That could be like a terrorist releasing a chemical agent.

All sorts of different things. And then with technological disasters, would you know what to do if the Internet were completely taken out for a day? Say somehow it was destroyed. All of the electricity in your home or area was not working. Other technology --

MARISSA RICE: That's an area actually that I have a little bit of experience with firsthand that recently happened in my neighborhood. The entire community, the power went out, and it was one of those things do you know where your candles are to have light? Do I know which neighbor I could call, because I apparently couldn't call any neighbors here. Ended up some friends of ours that live down the road from us, they had power. So we had to go stay with them.

And then speaking of which, Internet, we had to go use the Internet so we could communicate, because we had no phones, cell phones. Everybody was trying to call. So it was something. But we definitely will be ready the next time.

Penny Burke: Exactly. Exactly. And it's kind of just, you know, taking those thoughts of things that could happen in your area and thinking about them maybe before that situation were to happen so that way you would be ready for it. Because a lot of times, in our day-to-day lives it's hard to just be quickly ready to be prepared. Because you don't always think through every situation.

So I mean in that situation it was like, oh, wow, if I would have just had some precautions in place, this wouldn't have been a big deal. Now you're able to learn from it and probably will be able to be more successful in your response next time.

MARISSA RICE: And that is so true. That kind of leads me up to my next question. We've talked about the different types of events that we could prepare for. Now, let's get a little bit more into detail. What are some of the steps that I could take, our listeners could take to prepare not only themselves but the entire family for these types of events?

Penny Burke: Sure. There's three main things that we always say, which is be informed, make a plan and assemble supplies. But we've recently added a fourth, which is get involved.

So that's like the fourth new one that we'll talk about a little bit later.

MARISSA RICE: And so you know be informed, be informed, be informed, we hear that all the time. You know, what exactly does it mean to be informed?

Penny Burke: Well, one of the biggest things that we always tell people to be informed about is understanding the hazards in your area. So here in the DC area, what are some primary hazards that you could look to that you would know that this will impact my life at some point or another.

We have ice storms here. There could be flooding here. We've had tornadoes in the area. There's some certain natural hazards we can always look to to say, oh, well that's definitely something that could happen in my area.

DC, the whole national capital area here. We could say, yeah, it's definitely it could be a terrorist target. That would be something to be aware of. We have a lot of public transportation systems. If they were to go down, how would I get home? It's just thinking through some hazards in your area that could happen and fundamentally kind of deciding how you could plan around those events.

So being informed is really understanding what are some hazards in your area that could impact you. Like if you were in a rural area, you know, your hazards could be completely different. It could be, sure, the natural hazards, tornadoes,

big storms, blizzards, things like that. But additionally it could be like if my livestock gets a certain disease, I'm in a lot of trouble.

MARISSA RICE: Absolutely.

Penny Burke: Things like that. So it's really taking into account in your area what are some things that you need to be able to understand that could impact your life. And then after you have an assessment of that you would also want to know kind of what your local emergency manager and emergency management office is doing to make sure that you understand what your alerts and warnings are.

Alerts and warnings are a big, big thing in this world of communication that we have, where everybody's talking back and forth all the time. It's great if you can loop in with your local emergency management and get some way to understand how they're doing their alerts and warnings. A lot of them have advanced this to include that they will send you a text message. They will email you. So there's often ways to connect to them that way. And then there's obviously the warnings that you'll get over the television set that say, you know, warning, severe thunderstorm, warning something's happening at this road and be aware of that. They come over TV. They often come over radio as well. So understanding how you can get that information is a big, big part of being prepared. Because as we know, disasters hit at weird times. It's not ever at an ideal time.

MARISSA RICE: That's true.

Penny Burke: It can happen in the middle of the day. It can happen at any point. So really knowing how to get that information is a big key point, because you don't want to be in the dark about what's happening. And then just kind of knowing what government and government will and will not do for you in these situations.

Because a lot of people like the gentleman in San Francisco, well someone will be there to help me, I'm not going to worry about it. Well, they may have a lot of other people to deal with at that point with a big disaster. Like I'm thinking the obvious one in San Francisco would be an earthquake.

So if they have an elderly home that doesn't have power and has a lot of people who have ventilation systems or need special assistance, the first responders need to be able to address those folks first.

MARISSA RICE: Absolutely.

Penny Burke: They don't need to be bothering with those able-bodied folks who can really take care of themselves. So it's helping you understand, well, government can do this for me. But government cannot do this. So even in bigger situations, if you were looking at an evacuation situation where you would have

to evacuate your area, government will likely be able to shelter you. Will government be able to pay for you to get your house rebuilt, probably not. So it's looking at what are the things that government can help me with and what are things that I really need to make sure I take on for myself.

MARISSA RICE: And that is true, because I know a lot of times after a disaster when it's all said and done we look back and we say, okay, now we've lost some of our dwellings. And then we go to find out that insurance doesn't cover this and insurance will cover that.

So I guess it is very important, like you say, to be informed about what the government will pay for, what insurance will pay for and what you're going to be responsible for so that you are better prepared. So we talk about understanding our hazards in the area, using our local alerts and warnings, through our local emergency management offices, what the government will and will not do.

So here's the big question after I'm informed now what? What do I do next?

Penny Burke: I would highly recommend making a plan. Kind of what you were talking about right there. What does my insurance cover and what doesn't it cover. That would be a definite part of your plan. But fundamentally there's some important things you're going to want to make sure are a part of your plan and

you can get a lot of this information on www.ready.gov that can help you lay out and map out how you would make a plan.

MARISSA RICE: Very good.

Penny Burke: Yeah. One of them would be to make sure that you have an out-of-town contact. That would be, if a disaster were to hit right now and you weren't able to get in touch with your family, your children, husband, whomever you're living with, like making sure that there's a way that there's somebody you guys can contact out of town who can kind of help exchange messages back and forth for you.

Because sometimes as we saw during 9/11 hurricanes Katrina and Rita, families got separated. They weren't able to reach one another. It was hard for everybody to know if they were okay. So coming up with just a plan that says this is a person we all call if a disaster hits and we can't reach one another.

Somehow get a message to this person to let them know if you're okay and where you're at. It can be a real life saver in that way.

Another thing would be to make a meeting point for your family that may not be at your home, especially if a disaster area would impact your home. It's kind of a difficult thing to think about, but it's finding a place that you guys would all feel

comfortable with that you could meet at that you think you could get to if something big catastrophic were to happen.

So I know for me and my fiancé, we identified a local library where we know, if there's some way that we can't go back to our apartment complex and if we can't, if we're having problems leaving the city, we know of a local library that we would meet at. That's where we decided that's where we would go.

And it's just a way for us -- if we can't communicate in any other way we know that would be a central meeting point. And then kind of understanding, along with those plans, having a thorough understanding of what your local schools, if you have children's plans would be, and then also what your work plan is. So does your office kind of have a way that they're trying to -- that they'll communicate with one another if a disaster were to happen.

Do you know how to get your child if something's happening at the school and they need to get the children out of that location. Kind of having those conversations with them that you can incorporate into your plan as well. So knowing what your duties would be with your office and how they would respond to a disaster and then also how maybe your school would respond to a disaster so that way you'd know, okay, well, if this happens, the school will probably take the children on the bus to a different location.

And I know where that location is. I know it's going to come up. It's knowing all of these things that helps set your mind at ease and having a plan. And also just making sure that your whole family thoroughly understands this plan.

So whatever -- no plan is going to be full proof, but if your children have contact information, they know, okay this is my out-of-town contact, if I can't reach them I can try this person. They have a list and ways to get in touch with you somehow. And making sure that everybody's on board so that way you understand kind of where to go and what to do.

MARISSA RICE: That is so true. You know one of the biggest dilemmas, and I think we've probably seen this in hurricane Katrina. I'm sure they saw it in Rita and with the current hurricane situations a lot of people are torn, do we stay? Do we go? What do we do? I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that. What's your take on when do you stay and when do you go?

Penny Burke: Exactly. That's a great question. It's a hard question to answer, because typically what you're always going to do want to do is if the authorities are telling you to go, go. Don't question it.

Make sure you're prepared for that. But you're going to want to go, because it's the best thing to do. So if you're to go, you're going to want to plan where you

would go during an evacuation. So do you have an out-of-town family member that's not too far away that you could evacuate to.

Make sure you have a plan, if you aren't able to go to a family member's home, make sure you kind of have a plan about if you have to go to a shelter, make sure you have precautions. Like that you can bring with you. Like a go-kit. And make sure you ultimately have a plan for another member of the family, your pets.

Because pets are not always accepted at shelters. They're getting a lot better about that. Because there was a Pets Act that was passed so now there needs to be sheltering for pets and animals as well. But make sure -- your emergency manager may be aware of that that there's a pet shelter you can go to. Or if you're just evacuating and you're planning on staying at a hotel, find pet-friendly hotels so they can have a place to stay as well. Because that's going to be an important part of that.

So if you've been advised that you can stay and then you would like to stay, there's a lot of things that you're going to want to make sure you can do, too.

One is you're going to want to be prepared to stay for more than one day. The most recommended number is 72 hours. So making sure you have enough food and water and supplies to get you and your family through 72 hours.

And that includes everyone in the family. That includes your family members as well as your pets. Anything that you would need during that time. We also recommend that you designate a safe room. Especially in the event that you would have something like a tornado or a hurricane.

You want to go into an interior room where there's no windows and try to make that out to be like a safe room. It's a room you can also, if there to be a hazardous material attack that was going through the air, that you could seal off so that the hazardous agents couldn't get into your room. You're just going to want -- and it's typically an interior room. They tend to keep you more safe. Oftentimes what we'll find is that they actually end up being the bathroom.

MARISSA RICE: Yeah, that's true.

Penny Burke: Tends to be one of the safer rooms. Rarely do they have windows or a lot of times they're on the interior side of the house because of plumbing.

That's one of the safe rooms. I know that's where my safe room is. And then learn how to shut off your utilities. That's really going to be important, especially if you have gas. Oftentimes in big disasters that are catastrophic, such as bombs, hurricanes, tornadoes, even big blizzards, if they are able to damage something the right way with wind, they can hurt your gas lines.

And if you're being exposed to an open gas line, that could not only hurt you and kill you, it could also cause an even bigger disaster as far as things being blown up. So it's being aware of where those are and being able to shut them off so you aren't hurt. And that includes power lines as well. Like your power in your home.

And then understanding kind of how to close off vents with plastic and duct tape is important. I know a lot of people used to make fun of Tom Ridge and his whole bring out the plastic and duct tape. It's unfortunate, because the truth is there's a lot of value to being able to do that successfully.

Because it really can protect you if an agent is floating around in the air. So that's another thing that we highly recommend.

MARISSA RICE: Okay. Now, you mentioned this go-kit. What would be included in a go-kit? And I'm assuming that this go-kit would be for the three days which is equivalent to 72 hours, correct?

Penny Burke: Sure. There's two kits, as there is with staying put and going. There's the stay-put kit and there's a go-kit. With a stay-put kit, you're going to want to make sure, like what we were saying, you have all the supplies and things that you may need for one full day. So you'll have one kit for your home

and then you'll want to have one small portable kit that you could take with you if you have to leave.

So the larger home kit would include stuff like water for 72 hours, which we recommend you go and purchase. However, be aware that if you buy it in plastic bottles, you're going to want to switch your water out every three to six months. Because the plastic can leach. So that's just something to be aware of.

And that sounds like a lot of water, but I know there's been some people who do it successfully. I don't know if I really recommend it for the environment. One way that they said to do it was just buy a couple cases of water. And as you use one of those cases you kind of just continue to replenish that supply.

It's not as environmentally friendly. So I would almost just recommend going ahead and buying one case, one or two cases for you and your family, keeping it. If a disaster doesn't hit, use that water within the time frame and replenish it then.

Because I know especially with all of us trying to be a little more environmentally conscious, it's becoming a little bit more of an issue. Another thing you could have on hand is even if the water is not, you could have water that you keep in a certain area and if it's not -- you could put a little bit of bleach in it in order to cleanse the water so there aren't any bugs in it.

MARISSA RICE: Like chlorinated?

Penny Burke: If you wanted to use a different kind of water. Because a lot of times during a disaster water gets caught off and obviously that's one of the most important things that we all need. So that's a good thing to have. Then you're also going to want to have food for 72 hours. And food is actually not hard to pack away as you would think, because you want to have food that can last for a long time that you aren't going to have to worry about.

And one thing I always tell people is if you like peanut butter and you're able to eat it that's a great, great source of protein. It will keep you going and it's something that's easy to store and it won't go bad as quickly. Because you're going to want to keep replenishing your kit but you're going to want to have stuff that you can keep for a long time. Peanut butter. Canned goods. I don't know how many we recommend that -- just make sure you have the dates on there and you kind of know when you got them.

But if you have a can opener. Obviously granola bars. Things that are easy to eat that can keep for a while that have protein and some sustenance to them, that's really, really essential.

MARISSA RICE: Probably energy bars would also be another good one.

Penny Burke: Yeah, that's perfect. Exactly. So things that you're able to store away and that will stay good for a while. So in case anything were to happen, you have it on hand. Flashlights. That's essential, essential. And including with the flashlight batteries if you need them.

But they've also come out with the great flashlights, the one I have is a crank flashlight.

MARISSA RICE: I have one, too.

Penny Burke: It's the best one because you don't have to worry about having batteries or the batteries going out. You can just whip it out and crank it up and you have light. That's important. A Noah radio or a radio that can be battery operated. This is important for you to get emergency communications. So if you were in a situation kind of like you were the other day where everything was down, you didn't know what was going on, hopefully they've had a communication with the local radio stations or someone and they're able to get the information out.

You can get Noah radios are really helpful because that's their main purpose in life is to get emergency communications across. You can purchase these at any Radio Shack. I think even Best Buy, places like that have them.

And then that's a great way to get emergency communications. Obviously you'll want to have a first aid kit. Most people would probably think of that first for an emergency kit. But, yes, make sure you have a first aid kit with storyteller bandages, gloves, even. Things like that that you may need if you were to be injured. Garbage bags are perfect because they can do a lot of things. Garbage bags can keep you warm if you wear them over your clothing if you're cold. They can patch up a roof.

MARISSA RICE: That's true.

Penny Burke: They can close things off. They can close off ventilation so you're not getting toxic agents into your home. Garbage bags are a great, great thing to have in emergency kits.

They're one of those kind of jack-of-all-trades tools that can be really, really helpful. Dust masks are also recommended. That could just be, you know, who knows what's in the air at that time. If we think about even situations, as tragic as 9/11, where those folks who were downtown in that whiff of all of that toxic dust came flying down downtown. It would have been nice for a lot of them to have a dust mask to get themselves out of harm's way and evacuate with being able to breathe. Because a lot of people have suffered from health issues with that.

Dust masks are an obvious one. Whistles are very great as well. And the reason why we recommend whistles is if you were to be trapped or not able to get out of an area and need to signal someone, or even if you were in your home and just trying to signal someone, if you were trapped inside, whistles are a great way to grab somebody's attention.

So that's why we recommend whistles.

MARISSA RICE: Very good.

Penny Burke: Very good. And wrenches and pliers. And the reasons why you would need those is to turn off your gas and for utilities and stuff like that. It's a great way to be able to shut off your water, your gas, things like that. But that's what would be in a stay-home kit. Obviously there's more to it than that. You want to make sure you have things that are unique to your family's needs.

So prescription medications or glasses. So like if you know you're on a medication, you have medications that you must take. Especially if you were to suffer from something like diabetes or whatever. That helps keep you healthy and well. You're going to want to make sure that you have enough of those supplies on hand to sustain you for 72 hours.

A lot of times what people do that I think is intelligent. If you're working with especially your insurance companies and things like that you can order prescriptions that could last you for two months or so. And just kind of trying to make a culture that people do that rather than just getting their medications day-by-day.

And then obviously other things like your pet food and supplies are going to be important. Maybe games or toys to entertain your children. Formula or diapers for infants. And then one that will be an important one to have all in one place are your important family documents. And that includes like birth certificates, your insurance information.

You know, contact information for different things that are important to you. Like your banking information. All of that. And that information is going to be very significant to have in one place that can be picked up and come with you in a go-kit.

Now, in a go-kit you're going to want to have similar items the but you may need to have less because you need to get out of your house quickly. You may not be able to carry 72 hours worth of food and drinks and all that stuff with you. But if you can, try to. Try to take a small kit that kind of mirrors your larger stay-at-home kit. But, most importantly, make sure you have your important

family documents, because it's going to be one of those essential pieces of getting your life back to normal after a disaster.

So that's one of the big ones we always say to have. If you have to evacuate, make sure that you have stuff that's there to help kind of get you through and get you out of your home and that you'll be able to leave with quickly.

So because a lot of times in evacuation situations, especially with what we've seen with the hurricane situations, is that that stuff can be destroyed. And if it is, it's really, really hard to get your life back together. Because what do we in government always need? We need your Social Security number. We need your birth certificate. We need documentation. So that's one of the big things. So does that kind of answer your question about the go-kit? It needs to be similar, but it can be smaller. A little bit smaller that you can just grab and go.

MARISSA RICE: The to-go kit sounds like it's very important. Like you say, have the larger scale to-go kit and have the smaller portable one to take with you when you have to leave. I think that is very important. A lot of information that you have discussed today is really important. And there's a couple of things that come as a surprise that are really important.

And as a woman, sometimes we wouldn't even think, let's get a wrench or a plier to turn off gas. Because, you know, sometimes you might not be strong enough

to do that. But to have that tool would be something beneficial. The garbage bags to patch off a roof or close off ventilation. That is so important.

Peanut butter that's one of the things that's important to a woman's development. Make sure you get your folic acid you can get it from peanut butter it's amazing how we can talk about preparedness still relate back to being female and very important is nursing moms, moms that have children. Not only having formula and diaper, making sure you have enough breast milk pumped up. We know how tough that is to get it on a daily basis, but make sure you're prepared so you can still be able to nurse your baby. And as women, we know we're always responsible for entertainment, for the games, the toys to entertain our children.

These are very important topics here. Also, are there any other things that you can think of that could assist us in being prepared? You know we talked about the Citizens Corps Council. You know, what else is out there for us?

Penny Burke: Well, if you go to -- there are so many options and so many different ways that you can get involved in this a little bit more thoroughly about kind of being a safer community overall.

And being a part of a safer community. And you know ways that we recommend to do it are obviously you know getting involved through your local Citizen Corps

Council. If you go to www.citizencorps.gov you'll be able to locate a Citizen Corps Council in your area. Citizen Corps councils are usually comprised of community leaders and emergency management that kind of come together to have a more comprehensive conversation about how we need to be prepared as communities, to be more resilient against these bigger, large scale events that could impact us.

And not even just the bigger, large ones, but even the small ones that could impact the community. Even if you look at things like the economic crisis we're in right now, ways we can help our community have a conversation about being prepared in a lot of different ways.

MARISSA RICE: Absolutely.

Penny Burke: So if you go to citizencorps.gov you can find out more about the Citizen Corps Councils. Through Citizen Corps, we also support five primary volunteer partner programs. One is called Community Emergency Response Teams. This program is a great program, if you want to learn more about how you can be prepared and get more involved in emergency preparedness. Because not only does it go over the basic, you know, Being Prepared 101. It also teaches you kind of quick and dirty emergency response.

So if a disaster were to happen in your neighborhood, kind of like what we're talking about with that gentleman in San Francisco, and if he had taken the CERT training, he'd know what to do.

He would even have a team in his community that they would get together. They would be able to assess the situation. They could even start setting up kind of a triage, looking through, seeing who is hurt and who is not. It teaches you very quick and dirty first aid if somebody were to have a broken leg, how to splint it quickly.

And then it teaches you other public safety -- other public safety things that you can do, such as you know how do you put out a fire really quick? Like with a fire extinguisher? It's a really great program. You can find that at the citizen, off the Citizen Corps website as well. And there's a lot of CERT programs in local areas you can go to.

Similar in that line, I also would recommend you go to one of our affiliate organization websites, which is the American Red Cross. They have tons of training on how to be prepared and even more training about how to get more involved. Like if you were to want to -- maybe volunteer for your local Red Cross chapter during a disaster, so you could maybe assist them in their sheltering operations or help them with phone lines, things like that.

Another way to get involved, especially if you're a medical professional, is through Medical Reserve Corps. That's actually from the Federal Health and Human Services. This is a little bit similar to CERT, the Community Emergency RESPONSE team, just so you know they're known as CERT, and there's Medical Reserve Corps, which often referred to as MRCs. MRC units are used across the country. They are typically medical professional, but you don't need to be a medical professional to join. They form these units that can help support their community during a disaster situation, possibly through search support, like if you're a doctor or a nurse you could help out if there were to be a big event where somebody needed help, like a pandemic flu, a big disaster.

If people needed medical treatment, they would be able to supply that. And then larger than that, they also go out and they support public health. So a lot of times they'll campaign for different things to have in your home because of the pandemic flu and they do a lot of different things to be involved in their community. So Medical Reserve Corps units are great.

Some other ways to be involved are the other three programs we work with are Fire Corps and Volunteers in Police Service. I tend to lump these together because they're very similar. These volunteers go in and support their fire station or police station through ways that help out those stations that they can't necessarily do maybe because of financial shortfalls or whatnot. But like ways for them to volunteer, kind of more administratively.

So like with Fire Corps, a lot of times what they'll do is they'll help firefighters with public education or fund raising even, answering phones, things that they can help do so that the firefighter can better focus on their work.

Volunteers in Police Service, same thing. Volunteers in Police Service is a neat program. And they do a lot of neat things. We know there's been volunteers that do everything from crime scene investigations to flying helicopters. It's a really neat program to get involved with.

And, finally, there's Neighborhood Watch, which most of you, I'm sure, have heard of. It's a great program in your community. And it's one that I really would recommend, especially, you know, if you're just starting out and you want to get involved, this is a good one to do, because if you get to know your neighbors and you all kind of know, this is what our plan is if a disaster hits our neighborhood, think of how great that would be.

I mean, it definitely significantly keeps you a lot safer if you know one another. If you know there's an elderly woman down the road from me, someone needs to check on her if something were to happen.

My next-door neighbor has a son who's disabled. I'm going to need to make sure she has this, that and the other if something happens. Once you get to know your

neighborhood and your neighbors it's a great way to help first responders as well because you can help them if they come to your neighborhood highlight some places that may need some extra help.

MARISSA RICE: So true.

Penny Burke: Yes.

MARISSA RICE: Well, I'll tell you, this has been very informative, and I think that our listeners could definitely appreciate from this talk that we're having. And as you've identified here, there are many ways that everyone can be involved in emergency preparedness from administrative work to medical services.

And I think that is so important that you talk about knowing your neighbors.

Getting your plan together. You've provided a lot of additional information. And it seems like if anyone wants to start at the first level of getting prepared, it sounds like the CERT team, or the Community Emergency Response Team, would be a good place to start, and they can also get information at www.citizencorps.gov.

But it seems if you want comprehensive information you can go to www.ready.gov. And then for other resources you have the American Red Cross at www.americanredcross.com.

Penny, is there anything else you'd like today add as we get ready to close out our podcast?

Penny Burke: You know I don't think there's anything else. But I appreciate the opportunity to be able to supply you with some preparedness information. And I really hope those who are listening to this really heed the call and take us up on that, because I think it's a great way for all of us to be a more resilient nation and against anything that could happen to us.

MARISSA RICE: Yes, and I want to thank you so much, Penny, for taking time out of your day to conduct this podcast with me. So if I don't leave you guys with any charge, it is: Know your neighbors, know your surrounding, get your plan together and get ready. So I thank you so much for listening to this podcast on emergency preparedness and have a good day.