

Iowa Farmer Today

Tools help farmers prep for emergency

By Mandy Archer

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Working with local first responders to map hazards, power and water sources can help you be better prepared for a farm emergency.

Photo courtesy Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

The Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health Conference, or MRASH, was held in Dubuque, Iowa, Nov. 8-9. Though the conference is over, you may still access tools presented at the free post-conference workshop.

There are two important programs in the workshop that can help you prepare your farm for disaster — Disaster PrepWise, presented by Nick Ostrem, and Farm MAPPER (2.0), presented by Jakob Hanschu.

The PrepWise program is aimed toward older adults but can be used by anyone.

“We don’t like to think about [disasters] because maybe it’s kind of a bummer, but it really can affect anybody at any time,” Ostrem said.

He said most people have experienced a disaster that personally affected them, a family member, or someone they know, and so Ostrem started the PrepWise presentation debunking myths about disaster preparation, why it is important, and offering more specific action plans like talking to your doctor about prescription medication, creating a support network, and building a disaster kit.

Ostrem said, “Disaster preparation is really not the easiest thing in the world. We really build it up in our heads.”

The Disaster PrepWise program starts with Step 1, which is completing a personal and household assessment. He said trained interventionists from the program will sit down with you to help complete surveys about your home which can then be given out to people in your support network.

Ostrem talked in depth about Step 4 of PrepWise, which is on preparing medication for disaster. He talked about how to set aside medication to have about a three- to five-day supply of extras on hand,

or what it looks like if you cannot save your medication, such as if it needs to be refrigerated. Ostrem said to talk to your doctor if you are not able to build an extra supply of your medications.

This is extremely important for older adults, he said. You should know the side effects if you have to stop taking your medication altogether in an emergency.

Farm MAPPER 2.0, a program to help get your whole farm ready for an emergency, was rolled out on Oct. 30.

“Farm Mapping to Assist, Protect and Prepare Emergency Responders (Farm MAPPER) is a free online, mobile-friendly tool that provides emergency responders with on-site information about the locations and characteristics of farm hazards and emergency response resources as well as the physical layouts of agricultural operations,” Jakob Hanschu said.

The 2.0 version is more user-friendly, includes new icons for additional hazards, ability to measure square footage, and printable maps as a workaround for reliable internet connection.

Hanschu said the coordination between farmers and EMS/firefighters will save critical time in a farming disaster. Communicating with EMS before an emergency and allowing them to map your farm can be a major help. In an emergency, instead of scrambling to find the things they need when they arrive at your farm, they can study your farm on the way and create a plan before they step foot on your property.

“On the one hand, by pre-planning these operations, firefighters can coordinate more efficient and effective responses to farm emergencies that ultimately benefit the farm operation by potentially mitigating injury severity and reducing property loss,” Hanschu said. “On the other hand, farm pre-planning can reduce risk of injury to first responders that might be otherwise unfamiliar with the specific farm

or farm hazards in general. Thus, pre-planning farms for emergency response can be framed, from the firefighter/EMS viewpoint, as ‘help me, help you, help me.’”

Ultimately, the Farm MAPPER tool relies on the relationship between farmers and emergency responders. Thus, it is crucial for firefighters and EMS to reach out to farmers and tour their land and for farmers to work with EMS/firefighters and give permission for their farm to be mapped.

This pre-planning will lead to better response time, response coordination and resource allocation while on your farm, said Hanschu.

In short, many hazards that you are aware of are not as obvious to first responders, especially if this is their first time at your farm, and without pre-planning, even you can miss necessities in a disaster.

Contact Nick Ostrem at nicholas-ostrem@uiowa.edu or Jakob Hanschu at hanschujakob@marshfieldresearch.org if you interested in learning more.

Mandy Archer is the outreach specialist for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

