

News

## StormZone teaches students emergency planning

By **MIKE ROTHMAN**  
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Not many high school students get an opportunity to participate in real-world experiences with practical applications.

Last week, 14 integrated science students from Boynton Beach Community High School conducted a hurricane preparedness simulation at the Palm Beach County Emergency Operations Center at 20 S. Military Trail.

They prepared for and recovered from a fictional hurricane that swept through their county.

The exercise was part of StormZone, a school-based educational program designed for middle school and high school students to help them understand the importance of preparation and

teamwork.

"We teach them all the concept of what emergency planning really is," said Brian Hanley, coordinator for the Department of Emergency Management. "They are assigned a real position and actually get to play the role of their counterpart."

During the exercise, positions similar to actual ones with the Red Cross, the school boards, the fire departments and the Palm Beach County Commission, were represented.

Students learned to use DMAC, the county's messaging system for coordinating response efforts in a crisis.

The activity began when Jack Bevin from the National Hurricane Center appeared on the projector screen to warn students of a hurricane hov-

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**BRIAN HANLEY**  
COORDINATOR FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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ering around Cuba.

Tropical Storm Zack was heading north at 9 mph with 65-mph winds. The National Hurricane Center ordered a hurricane watch in Palm Beach County. The students worked on preparation.

"You get a real flavor for how quickly the storm builds and when it will hit the county," Hanley said.

Bertho Etienne, 17, acted as chairman for the County Commission. He said he enjoyed the oppor-

tunity to see things from a different perspective.

"It's not easy," he said. "I know one thing. I am not going to complain about them because they are doing the best they can, and we are doing the best we can."

Mock reporter Kathy Alexis, a 15-year-old sophomore, interviewed Etienne. "It's really interesting and gives us an appreciation for the people who actually do this work. It was just nice to see the other side of what we see on television," he said.

Science teacher Erich Landstrom heard about this event during a science department meeting in August, but he didn't decide to enroll his students until he talked to teachers from Park Vista High School, who had

completed the simulation.

"They told me I had to do it, so I said OK to it," he said. "In the classroom, I can try to demonstrate storm search but not the real-world application of what's happening here and actually putting them in the chair of somebody who works here."

DHL Express sponsors the program and makes StormZone possible.

"From our perspective, we believe in the aspect of preparation and fostering a culture of preparedness," said Dan Ludwig, emergency management representative for DHL.

Ludwig said he gave the students three Cs to consider during their simulation: remaining calm, communication and collaboration.

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