

Disaster Ready Austin

AUSTIN, TX – Austin’s city leaders have seen disaster before and understand the folly of waiting and hoping that a disaster will never again hit this area. With that in mind, they developed Disaster Ready Austin in collaboration with Travis County and the American Red Cross.

Directed by the City of Austin’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM), the purpose of the initiative is to educate and empower residents to be prepared for emergencies and disasters. The vision is a whole community approach to disaster preparedness education in the City of Austin.

“Our basic message to [residents] is to protect themselves,” says Jacob Dirr, public information and marketing officer of HSEM’s Community Preparedness Programs. “The goal is to educate Austin residents on basic preparedness for all types of hazards, including first aid tips and what to do in case of flash floods, wildfires, severe weather, pandemic flu, or accidents involving hazardous materials.”

“The preparedness website at <https://austintexas.gov/disasterreadyaustin> educates adults as well as children,” says Dirr, who notes that “a lot of kids understand Spanish more than English, so we have a huge push toward Spanish.” Online resources, such as contact cards and emergency kit checklists are offered in English and Spanish.

HSEM Community Education and Outreach staff take advantage of scheduled meetings, such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) gatherings at the schools, where they promote the program. Other audiences include Boy Scout groups, hospitals, fairs, kids’ summer programs, private association groups, and school events.

At the center of the popular program is “Ready Freddie,” which Dirr describes as a “lovable mascot who entertains and educates the children but is enjoyed by everyone. The character is enthusiastic and shares his knowledge of disaster preparedness by engaging the audience in fun activities.”

A visit by Ready Freddie includes “Too Prepared to Be Scared,” an activity booklet which Dirr says is a huge hit with the children. “It’s full of colorful disaster-related advice such as information on developing an emergency supply kit, having an emergency plan, and keeping pets safe.” Featuring puzzles, games, and animated figures to help get the preparedness message across, the booklet also has a certificate of appreciation children can receive when they finish.

Dirr adds that the program has continued to grow with more groups asking for the mascot to visit and teach. One of the biggest events attended by HSEM staff is the “Back to School Bash” held for the Austin Independent School District at the downtown convention center. More than 100 vendors participated, with attendance exceeding 8,000. The staff, along with Ready Freddie, discussed disaster preparation and distributed the activity booklets along with other preparation materials.

For additional information about the “Disaster Ready Austin” initiative visit: <https://austintexas.gov/disasterreadyaustin>.



Disaster Ready Austin display sign



Ready Freddie is the mascot who brings the education program to children.