FEMA Updates Digital Preparedness Tools

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FEMA has two new ways to help people in Louisiana be better prepared for severe weather and hurricanes: 1) the redesigned FEMA app for smartphones and 2) the updated text-to-shelter service.

Smartphone App

FEMA recently released a redesigned smartphone app that gives users more personalized options. Downloading the app and then setting preferences is a simple way for Louisianans to be better prepared as we enter peak hurricane season. Users can enter their location and the app will show them the information they need. Users also can enter up to four other locations, so they can get information relevant for family and friends or to their workplace.

The Recover section opens with the basics about federal disaster declarations and continues with frequently asked questions about applying for assistance. The Preparedness section has been re-worked, with topics listed under Latest and A-Z sections. And popular features such as weather alerts, emergency shelter locations and disaster recovery center information have been revamped to be more user-friendly.

The app has a Spanish language option. It’s available for free download on iOS or Android. Current users will need to update their app but they do not need to re-download.

Shelter Locator Texting

While the FEMA App has a lot to offer, disasters can disrupt communications systems, and mobile internet service may not be reliable. However, texting capabilities often remain unaffected. Plus, not everyone has a smartphone. That’s why the Text to Shelter service exists and was updated earlier this year.

Anyone needing shelter in a disaster can simply text “shelter” and their ZIP code to 43362 and they will get a list of nearby shelter locations. With the update, they will get a list of shelter addresses within 200 miles of the entered ZIP code, not only those shelters within that ZIP code.

The shelters identified through the text feature are pulled from data managed by the American Red Cross (FEMA’s partner for this service). FEMA does not run shelters. In a disaster situation follow the instructions of state and local officials, as they may be able to point survivors to additional shelters and resources not included in the text feature.