

Parish declared storm ready

BY WILLIAM JOHNSON • WJOHNSON@DAILYWORLD.COM • JULY 10, 2008

Hurricane season is upon us again and the National Weather Service says St. Landry Parish is storm ready.

"We only give this designation to select parishes," said Andy Patrick with the NWS office in Lake Charles. "St. Landry Parish is ready to protect the lives and property of its citizens."

To qualify for the storm ready designation, which is good for three years, the parish has reviewed its storm preparation plans, made sure all equipment is up to date and reviewed intergovernmental agreements to make sure every first-responder in the parish is ready whenever and wherever nature may strike.

Patrick, speaking before the parish council, said the award represents a parishwide readiness and gave special praise to Lisa Vidrine, executive director of the St. Landry Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

"Storm ready helps arm America's communities with the communication and safety skills needed to save lives and property - before and during the event," Patrick said.

For her part, Vidrine gave part of the praise to the dozens of parish volunteers who have completed Storm Spotters training - agreeing to be the NWS' local eyes and ears on the ground.

"The more access we have to weather information, the better we can be prepared," Vidrine said.

The volunteers have been trained about the NWS' equipment and mission, given information on clouds and weather and taught to evaluate storm damage.

Joe Rua, a meteorologist with the NWS station in Lake Charles, said such storm spotters are an important element of his job.

His equipment can tell a great deal about weather patterns in the atmosphere but because of trees, hills, buildings and other obstructions, it is not effective at ground level. "If we spot a tornado, they can tell us if it has actually touched down."

Patrick said the storm ready designation began in Tulsa, Okla., in 1999 and proved so successful that it quickly expanded nationwide.

He said being storm ready is critically important in terms of saving lives.

"Americans live in the most severe weather-prone country on Earth. Each year, Americans cope with an average of 10,000 thunderstorms, 5,000 floods, 1,000 tornadoes and an average of two land-falling deadly hurricanes," Patrick said.

"Some 90 percent of all presidentially declared disasters are weather related, leading to around 500 deaths per year and nearly \$14 billion in damage," Patrick said.

He said, when such disasters strike, storm ready communities such as St. Landry Parish are better prepared to save lives through better planning, education and awareness.