



## St. Mary's County Health Department

### NEWS RELEASE

[www.smchd.org](http://www.smchd.org)

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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#### ST. MARY'S COUNTY AIMS TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT HEALTH EMERGENCY

National Public Health Week Activities Highlight  
Disaster Preparedness and Planning

(LEONARDTOWN, MD) March 28, 2007 - Despite well known threats and a host of awareness campaigns, Americans remain largely unprepared for public health emergencies, according to the American Public Health Association. The association recently surveyed emergency planning and preparedness behaviors and learned that only 27 percent of those surveyed had a reliable first aid kit and enough water, food and medicine to last three days.

St. Mary's County Health Department is highlighting disaster preparedness through community outreach events and its annual Public Health Heroes Breakfast during National Public Health Week, Apr. 2 – 8. “Being prepared individually and as a community for public health emergencies is a central issue to good health,” explains Dr. William Icenhower, St. Mary's County's Health Officer. “Although we shouldn't dwell on the likelihood of a disaster affecting our community or our family, taking measurable steps in the direction of emergency planning

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can help all of us be more prepared if something should occur.” National Public Health Week will aim to close the gap between those who have taken that important first step to come up with an emergency plan that fits the unique needs of their family, business or organization and those who have not.

The health department is partnering with St. Mary's County Community Services and Navy personnel from NAS Patuxent River to 'Stuff-a-Bus' with non perishable foods for two local food banks, in an effort to draw attention to the important role food banks and community pantries play as resource for food during the recovery period following a disaster. A St. Mary's County Health Department transportation program van will be parked at the Governmental Center in Leonardtown Wed. Apr. 4 from 7:30 – 9:30 a.m. and at the Leonardtown Food Lion from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. St. Mary's County Transit Service (STS) will park a bus at the Giant grocery store in California near Target Thurs. Apr. 5 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The public is invited and encouraged to drop off non-perishable food items to fill these buses. Donations will go to the food pantries at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Leonardtown, and St. Mary's Caring, Lexington Park.

In addition, the Health Department's mascot, Opie Otter, will be spreading the word about emergency preparedness at the St. Mary's County Library in Lexington Park Tues. April 3 and at the Charlotte Hall branch Wed. Apr 4 from 1 – 2:30 p.m. each day. St. Mary's County Kiwanis Club recently purchased the mascot costume for the health department, formalizing a partnership between the two organizations aimed at getting health and safety information into the hands of St. Mary's County's most vulnerable population, young children.

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The health department's annual Public Health Heroes Breakfast will be held Thursday, Apr. 5 at St. Andrews Episcopal Church in California. Over 20 nominees will be honored for their work relating to emergency preparedness and planning. David Zylak, St. Mary's County Director of Public Safety will be keynote speaker.

For more information on these events, please contact Leslie Payne, St. Mary's County Health Department public information officer, at 301-475-4318. For ideas on preparing for public health emergencies, visit the National Public Health Week Web site at [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org).

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