

CITY

AID

HK\$40 KIT BAG THAT MAKES DIFFERENCE OF LIFE OR DEATH

Teaching survival skills to people in disaster-prone areas needn't be expensive, Chinese University's relief team is proving

Lo Wei
wei.lo@scmp.com

Cheap and simple supplies like a whistle, sugar and salt or even a family photo could be the difference between life and death in the event of a flood, earthquake or other natural disaster.

That's the message a team from Chinese University's centre for disaster and medical humanitarian response is delivering to mainlanders living in rural areas prone to natural catastrophes.

As well as teaching simple skills that save lives, the academics and students give families a rescue and relief bag to grab should disaster strike.

The team has visited 21 villages in eight mainland provinces since 2009.

For a recent visit to the flood-prone village of Hongyan in Sichuan (四川) province, the team was joined by Professor Jennifer Leaning, an expert in disaster response from Harvard University's school of public health.

"We tell the villagers that it's not just a matter of fate. You can do something to save yourself and families," Leaning said.

The universities are working together to offer humanitarian response training in Hong Kong to medical professionals and others preparing to join relief efforts, including exercises which simulate the aftermath of a disaster.

Leaning has run similar exercises in the forests of New England, with trainees camping out,



Professor Jennifer Leaning, right, gives a disaster relief bag to a villager in the flood-prone village of Hongyan in Sichuan. Photo: CUHK

dealing with "victims" in the form of sticks with different markings to indicate the condition of the person involved, and actors launching raids or kidnappings.

Professor Emily Chan Ying-yang, director of the Chinese University centre, said similar training would be offered in Hong Kong next year.

Leaning says not enough emergency response training is offered in Asia, and Hong Kong has the capacity to fill the void.



It's not just a matter of fate. You can do something to save yourself

JENNIFER LEANING

The team returned from Hongyan on Tuesday.

They distributed emergency bags containing 11 simple pieces of equipment to more than 300 villagers, members of the Yi ethnic minority, and held workshops on using them.

The bags included whistles to be used to summon help, a lighter to start fires for boiling water and a blanket for warmth. The team also took family photographs to put into the bags – as

these are more useful than describing a missing child.

Villagers were taught how to mix salt and sugar into drinking water to help prevent dehydration when suffering diarrhoea. The bags cost about 30 yuan (HK\$38) to put together.

The team is monitoring the effectiveness of its work, hoping its efforts will lead to changes in government policy. "You don't need much money. It's mainly skills and organisation," Chan said.

WEATHER

Rainfall at peak of Sunday's storm sets March record

56mm of rain that fell between 9pm and 10pm was highest since Observatory records began

Staff Reporter

The hourly rainfall at the peak of Sunday's dramatic storm was the highest recorded in March since records began in 1884, the Observatory revealed yesterday.

The night saw the first time the black rainstorm signal was used in the month of March since the warning system was introduced in 1992.

The Observatory said 56 millimetres of rain fell between 9pm and 10pm in some areas – a record for a single hour in March. More than 100mm was recorded in three to four hours in Kowloon and the New Territories, with rainfall reaching 150mm in Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan and Sha Tin.

The month of March typically sees just 82.2mm of rainfall, according to Observatory statistics.

The Observatory earlier revealed that the 103.1mm of rainfall recorded at its headquarters in Tsim Sha Tsui on Sunday was the fourth highest on a single March day in history.

The storms continued on Wednesday night, when hail again fell in the New Territories and the amber rainstorm warning was issued. The warning was cancelled at 6am yesterday.

Hailstones the size of golf balls fell on Tsuen Wan during Sunday's storm, which disrupted hundreds of flights. There were also long delays on some MTR lines.

The storm washed out celebrations at the end of the rugby Sevens at Hong Kong Stadium, and there was widespread flooding – not least at the Festival Walk shopping mall in Kowloon Tong. In its monthly weather report, the Observatory reported that March had been characterised by "gloomy weather during the first half... and heavy rain episodes towards the end", with only five hours of bright sunshine, all during the first half of the month.

The average temperature last month was 18.7 degrees Celsius, compared to an average of 19.1 degrees for March.

Total rainfall for the month was 207.6mm, compared to the normal figure of 82.2mm – and 99 per cent of that fell in the last three days.

But weather forecasters say brighter weather is expected for today and tomorrow, before thundery showers resume next week.

In June 2008, 145.5mm of rain fell between 8am and 9am in Tsim Sha Tsui, the most in an hour since records began in 1884.



Escalators in Festival Walk during Sunday's deluge.