Personal Hurricane Response

Hurricanes can be dangerous killers. Learning the hurricane warning messages and planning ahead can reduce the chances of injury or major property damage.

Before

**Plan an evacuation route.** Contact the local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter and ask for the community hurricane preparedness plan. This plan tells the safest evacuation routes and nearby shelters. Learn safe routes inland. Be ready to drive 20 to 50 miles inland to locate a safe place.

**Have these disaster supplies on hand:**

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Tool kit
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water (for 3 days)
- Nonelectric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes
- Blankets and pillows
- Extra set of home and car keys
- Vehicle fuel tanks full

**Make arrangements for pets.** Pets may not be allowed into emergency shelters for health and space reasons. Contact your local humane society for information on local animal shelters and pet-friendly hotels and shelters. You can also check the Internet for names of pet-friendly accommodations in your area. Prepare pet disaster kits that include:

- Pet registration and immunization records
- Food and water
- Carrier or cage
Ensure that family members know what to do after a hurricane. Teach them how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water. Teach children how and when to call 911, the police or the fire department and which radio station carries emergency information. Your area may have a 311 emergency information number to get up-to-date reports to and report non-life-threatening situations.

Protect your windows. Permanent shutters are the best protection. A lower-cost approach is to put up plywood panels. Use 1/2-inch plywood—marine plywood is best—cut to fit each window. Remember to mark which board fits which window. Pre-drill holes every 18 inches for screws. Do this long before the storm.

Trim back dead or weak branches from trees.

Check into flood insurance. You can find out about the National Flood Insurance Program through your local insurance agent or emergency management office. There is normally a 5-day waiting period before a new policy becomes effective. Homeowners’ policies do not cover damage from hurricane-caused flooding.

Develop an emergency communication plan. Family members can be separated from one another during a disaster (for example, when adults are at work and children are at school). Have a plan for getting back together. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the “family contact.” After a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person. Numbers also can be programmed into family members’ phones.

Hurricane Watches and Warnings
A hurricane watch means there is a possibility of hurricane conditions within 36 hours.

A hurricane warning is issued when hurricane conditions (winds of 74 miles per hour or greater, or dangerously high water and rough seas) are expected in 24 hours or less.

In 2003, the National Hurricane Center began issuing 5-day hurricane forecasts; previously only 3-day forecasts were issued. The forecast predicts the most likely path that a hurricane will follow.

During a Hurricane Watch

- Listen to a radio or television for storm reports (have a working, battery-operated radio nearby).
- Check emergency supplies.
- Fuel car.
- Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys and garden tools and anchor objects that cannot be brought inside.
- Secure buildings by closing and boarding up windows. Remove outside antennas.
- Turn refrigerator and freezer to coldest settings. Open only when absolutely necessary and close quickly.
- Store drinking water in clean jugs, bottles, and cooking utensils.
- Review evacuation plan.
Moor boat securely or move it to a designated safe place. Use rope or chain to secure boat to trailer. Use tie-downs to anchor trailer to the ground or house.

During a Hurricane Warning…

- Listen constantly to a battery-operated radio or television for official instructions.
- If in a mobile home, check tie-downs and evacuate immediately.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container on the highest level of your home or take them with you.
- Avoid elevators.

If at home:

- Stay inside, away from windows, skylights and glass doors.
- Keep flashlights and extra batteries handy. Avoid open flames, such as candles and kerosene lamps, as a source of light.
- If power is lost, turn off major appliances to reduce power surge when electricity is restored.
- Remember that cordless non-cellular phones will not work if the electricity is out.

If officials indicate evacuation is necessary:

- Leave as soon as possible. Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.
- Secure your home by unplugging appliances and turning off electricity and the main water valve.
- Tell someone outside of the storm area where you are going.
- If time permits, and you live in a surge zone, protect furniture from flooding by elevating it or move it to a higher floor.
- Bring pre-assembled emergency supplies and warm protective clothing.
- Take blankets and sleeping bags to shelter.
- Lock up home and leave.

After the Hurricane Has Passed

Stay tuned to local radio for information.

- Help injured or trapped persons.
  - Give first aid where appropriate.
  - Do not move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of further injury.
  - Call for help.
- Return home only after authorities advise that it is safe to do so.
- Avoid loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately to the power company, police or fire department.
○ Enter your home with caution.
  - Beware of snakes, insects and animals driven to higher ground by flood water.
  - Open windows and doors to ventilate and dry your home.
  - Check refrigerated foods for spoilage.

○ Take pictures of the damage, both to the house and its contents for insurance claims.

○ Drive only if absolutely necessary. Avoid flooded roads and washed-out bridges.

○ Use telephone only for emergency calls.

Inspecting Utilities in a Damaged Home
Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor’s home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Don’t step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker; call an electrician for advice.

Check sewage and water lines for damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid water from the tap. Obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.

Mitigation
Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now such as strengthening unreinforced masonry to withstand wind and flooding and installing shutters on every window will help reduce the impact of hurricanes in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.