

# FACT SHEET



Federal Emergency Management Agency

## HURRICANES

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

### 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 should include information on 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 disaster supplies on hand.

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Nonelectric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

### 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.

### Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a hurricane.

Teach family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water.

Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, or fire department and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.

### 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 the flooding that accompanies a hurricane.

### Develop an emergency communication plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a disaster (this is a real possibility during the day 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.

### Hurricane Watches and Warnings

A hurricane watch is issued when there is a threat of hurricane conditions within 24-36 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.

### DURING A HURRICANE WATCH

- Listen to a battery-operated radio or television for hurricane progress reports.
- 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 bathtubs, 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.

- Avoid elevators.

#### If at home:

- Stay inside, away from windows, skylights, and glass doors.

- Keep a supply of 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.

#### 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 an identified surge zone, elevate furniture to protect it from flooding or better yet, 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.

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, or 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 and for insurance claims.

Drive only if absolutely necessary and 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. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.

##### Check for sewage and water lines 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 using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.

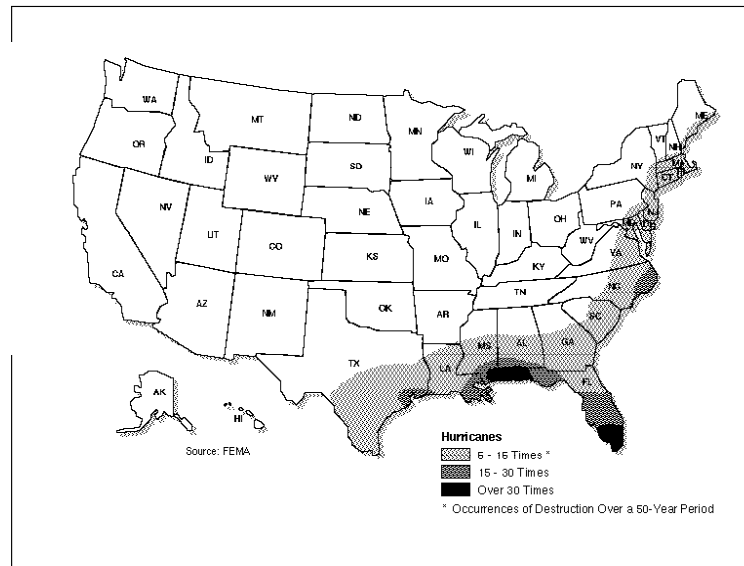
#### Mitigation

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.

# H U R R I C A N E S

## EMERGENCY INFORMATION

1. The 74 to 160 mile per hour winds of a hurricane can extend inland for hundreds of miles. Hurricanes can spawn tornadoes, which add to the destructiveness of the storm. Floods and flash floods generated by torrential rains also cause damage and loss of life. Following a hurricane, inland streams and rivers can flood and trigger landslides.
2. When a hurricane watch is issued, the best response is to protect your property by boarding up windows, bringing in outside items, and being prepared to evacuate the area as soon as officials so advise.
3. Even more dangerous than the high winds of a hurricane is the *storm surge*—a dome of ocean water that can be 20 feet high at its peak and 50 to 100 miles wide. The surge can devastate coastal communities as it sweeps ashore. Nine out of 10 hurricane fatalities are attributable to the storm surge.



Areas in the United States vulnerable to hurricanes include the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from

## WHAT IS A HURRICANE?

*A hurricane is a tropical storm with winds that have reached a constant speed of 74 miles per hour or more.*

*Hurricane winds blow in a large spiral around a relatively calm center known as the "eye." The "eye" is generally 20 to 30 miles wide, and the storm may extend outward 400 miles. As a hurricane approaches, the skies will begin to darken and winds will grow in strength. As a hurricane nears*

*land, it can bring torrential rains, high winds, and storm surges. A single hurricane can last for more than 2 weeks over open waters and can run a path across the entire length of the eastern seaboard.*

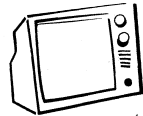
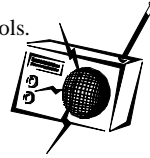
*August and September are peak months during the hurricane season, that lasts from June 1*

## HELP YOUR COMMUNITY GET READY

The media can raise awareness about hurricanes by providing important information to the community. Here are some suggestions:



1. Publish a special section in your local newspaper with emergency information on hurricanes. Localize the information by printing the phone numbers of local emergency services offices, the American Red Cross, and hospitals.
2. Provide hurricane tracking charts to local schools.
3. Work with local emergency services and American Red Cross officials to prepare special reports for people with mobility impairments on what to do if an evacuation is ordered.
4. Stage a simulated evacuation to show your community what can happen.
5. Periodically inform your community of local public warning systems.



## DID YOU KNOW...

- In less than a 4 week period in 1992, two major hurricanes hit the United States leaving an unprecedented array of devastation. First Hurricane Andrew pounded parts of Florida and Louisiana to become the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history with damage estimates in the range of \$15 billion to \$30 billion. Then 3 weeks later, Hurricane Iniki affected three Hawaiian islands resulting in over \$1 billion in damage, particularly on Kauai.
- Eighteen of the 54 direct deaths attributed to Hurricane Andrew occurred during the recovery phase. Of those identified, eight were stress-induced heart attacks, three were either people falling in damaged buildings or hit by debris while cleaning up, and two were children who died in fires in damaged homes.
- On the average, 10 tropical cyclones develop in the North Atlantic each year. Of these, six may strengthen to hurricane proportion, of which two are likely to strike the coast of the United States.
- Hurricane winds in the northern hemisphere circulate in a counterclockwise motion around the hurricane's center or "eye," while hurricane winds in the southern hemisphere circulate clockwise.
- The Galveston, Texas, hurricane in 1900 was the natural disaster that resulted in the most deaths in United States history. This hurricane took 6,000 lives.

## HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP AFTER A DISASTER

When disaster strikes, people everywhere want to help those in need. To ensure that this compassion and generosity are put to good use, the media can highlight these facts:

- ▶ Financial aid is the immediate need of disaster victims. Financial contributions should be made through a recognized voluntary organization to help ensure that contributions are put to their intended use. At some point local officials may ask for donations of clothing. However, immediately after a disaster, relief workers usually don't have the time or facilities to setup distributions channels, and too often these items go to waste.
- ▶ Before sending food donations, wait for instructions from local officials. If officials ask for food, baby food is needed first, then ready-to-eat, non-perishable items.
- ▶ Volunteers should go through a recognized voluntary agency such as the American Red Cross or Salvation Army. They know what is needed and are prepared to deal with the need. Local emergency services directors also coordinate all kinds of volunteer efforts.
- ▶ Organizations wishing to donate items should first contact local officials to find out what is needed. Be prepared to deliver the items to one place, tell officials when you'll be there, and provide for transportation, driver, and unloading.