

Security Spotlight

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Hurricanes: Weathering the Whirlwinds of Wreckage



Great news! The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is forecasting reduced hurricane and tropical storm activity for 2014. That is good news, but even a reduced threat is still a threat that cannot be ignored.

While fewer and less intense storms are cause for rejoicing, it does not mean that we are out of danger. According to Dr. Peter Neilley, Vice President of Global Forecasting Services at Weather Services International (WSI), the forecast is only for the total number of storms and their intensity, but there are no accurate predictions as to where any of these storms may make landfall. For example, in 1983 there were only four storms large enough to merit a name, but one of them was Alicia, which hit the Houston-Galveston area as a Category 3 hurricane, causing \$2.6 billion in damage and killing 21 people. The moral of the story is that it does not matter if hurricane activity is less than normal if you are in the storm's path of destruction.

Respect the Hurricane's Strength

The power of a hurricane is truly staggering. The total energy of an average hurricane is 200 times the amount of power that can be generated by all of the electrical power plants in the world! The amount of

rain dropped by an average hurricane would fill over 22 million swimming pools! The size of hurricanes can be fantastic as well, with an average storm stretching more than 100 to 300 miles in diameter. Hurricane Sandy was more than 800 miles in diameter, covering million square miles of the Northeastern states.

The average hurricane that makes landfall can cause a median amount of \$1.8 billion in damages. From 1940 to 2013 hurricanes caused 1,484 deaths worldwide, according to NOAA.

Besides the direct damage caused by hurricane winds, which can reach over 155 miles per hour, there is a massive amount of damage as a result of flooding. Hurricanes can also trigger landslides and mudslides which can bury entire communities and make roads impassable for days.

To make matters worse, wind and water damage from hurricanes can cause massive power outages that can last for weeks. During Hurricane Sandy nearly six million people were without power, some for as long as 12 days.

Clearly, hurricanes demand our respect, so let us give it to them by knowing how to prepare, respond, and recover. The following tips can help you begin to prepare.

How to Prepare

Ready.Gov has an extensive list of preparations for weathering a hurricane. Following is a quick summary. You can get full details on these tips and more by going to the Ready.Gov website (www.ready.gov).

- Build an emergency kit.
- Make a family communications plan.
- Learn your community's hurricane evacuation route and know where to find higher ground.
- Make plans to secure your property.
- Cover your home's windows. Permanent storm shutters are best; boarding up with 5/8" exterior grade plywood can also help. Applying tape to windows will **not** stop the glass from breaking.
- Be sure trees and shrubs around your home are well-trimmed so they are more wind resistant.
- Reinforce your garage doors; if wind enters a garage it can cause structural damage.
- Bring inside any loose objects (outdoor furniture, lawn decorations, garbage cans, bikes, etc.) or securely tie them down. During a hurricane they can become deadly missiles.

How to Respond

- Listen to the radio or TV for information.
- Turn off utilities if the authorities instruct you to do so. Otherwise, turn your refrigerator to its coldest setting and keep its doors closed.
- Turn off any propane tanks.
- Avoid using your landline telephone, except for emergencies. Lightning can travel through telephone wires.
- Fill your bathtub and other containers with water.
- Stay in your home, but if the authorities advise you to evacuate, **do so immediately**.
- Stay indoors and away from windows and glass doors.

- If necessary, take refuge in a small interior room, closet, or hallway on the lowest level.
- You should also evacuate if you live in a mobile home, a high-rise building, on the coast, on a floodplain, near a river, or on an island waterway.
- Do not use elevators.
- Do not be fooled by a lull; it could be the eye of the storm and the winds will increase as the eye passes over your location.

How to Recover

- Listen to radio or TV for the latest news and weather updates.
- Be alert for extended rainfall and possible flooding even after the hurricane has passed.
- If you are separated from your family, use your family communications plan or contact the American Red Cross for assistance in locating your family.
- If you cannot return home and have immediate housing needs, text SHELTER + your ZIP code to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: shelter 12345).
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can help people who have longer-term housing needs due to a disaster.

Don't Wait; Educate – Additional Resources

The tips in this article are but a few of the many useful recommendations and resources that can be found by visiting the websites listed below.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.fema.gov)

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hurricane Center (www.nhc.noaa.gov)

The American Red Cross Hurricane Preparedness site (www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/hurricane)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control site (emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/)

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