

Disaster Preparedness: Plan and Prepare for Hurricanes



This checklist will help you prepare for a hurricane's effect on your organization, employees, and community by highlighting the tasks you should complete before, during, and after a storm. When the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Hurricane Center issues a watch or warning, use the time available to begin taking the following steps.

Storm Threat Details:

The National Weather Service rates hurricanes by their sustained wind speed using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale of one to five. This scale was developed in the 1970s to help scientists communicate storm risk more effectively to the public. You should, however, not ignore the risks of an oncoming storm, regardless of category. The simplified scale, somewhat controversially, only considers wind speed, not other damaging and deadly threats like storm surge, rainfall rates, and tornadoes. Just because a storm is slow-moving, does not mean it won't cause significant damage. For example, Hurricane Isaac in 2012 caused deaths and devastation as a category 1 storm largely from the mass rainfall and tornadoes accompanying landfall.

Know the Terms:

Tropical Depression: An organized system of clouds and thunderstorms with a defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 38 MPH (33 knots) or less. Sustained winds are defined as one-minute average wind measured at about 33 feet (10 meters) above the surface.

Tropical Storm: An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39–73 MPH (34–63 knots).

Hurricane: An intense tropical weather system of strong thunderstorms with a well-defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 74 MPH (64 knots) or higher.

Storm Surge: A dome of water pushed onshore by hurricane and tropical storm winds. Storm surges can reach 25 feet high and be 50–1000 miles wide. Storm surge is by far the greatest threat to life and property along the immediate coast.

Storm Tide: A combination of a storm surge and the normal tide (i.e., a 15-foot storm surge combined with a two-foot normal high tide over the mean sea level created a 17-foot storm tide).

Hurricane/Tropical Storm Watch: Hurricane/tropical storm conditions are possible in the specified area of the watch, usually within 48 hours. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, or television for information.

Hurricane/Tropical Storm Warning: Hurricane/tropical storm conditions are expected in the specified area of the warning, usually within 36 hours of the onset of tropical storm force winds. Complete storm preparations and immediately leave the threatened area if directed by local officials.

Extreme Wind Warning: Extreme sustained winds of a major hurricane (115 mph or greater), usually associated with the eyewall, are expected to begin within an hour. Take immediate shelter in the interior portion of a well-built structure. Short Term Watches and Warnings: These warnings provide detailed information about specific hurricane threats, such as flash floods and tornadoes.

Before the Hurricane

Contact your recovery service provider, such as Agility Recovery, and place them on alert status.

Stay up-to-date on the storm's progress via radio, TV or NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards receiver. Ensure your mobile device settings allow WEA (Wireless Emergency Alerts).

Determine safe evacuation routes inland as well as alternative routes.

Review your shelter-in-place plan, making sure your disaster kit is fully stocked and fresh batteries and supplies are included.

Ensure you have an emergency communication plan in place prior to the storm, evacuation, or threat and begin advance notifications.

Back up all data on servers and personal computers. If the backup site is within the area that may be affected by the storm, consider backing up to a more remote site or to the cloud.

Ensure remote access to your company website and establish a team to manage updates to the site during and after the storm. And routines.

Turn off and unplug all non-critical devices such as server monitors and workstations and other non-essential electrical equipment. Make sure any equipment is raised above potential flood levels or removed from threatened sites.

Check the integrity of the uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Move the UPS to the highest level possible above the floor.

Inspect and make necessary repairs to drains, gutters, and flashing.

Strap or anchor to the roof deck support assembly (e.g., the joists) all roof-mounted equipment such as HVAC units and exhaust vents.

Alert any third party partners/suppliers about your company's relocation plan in the event the storm makes your location inaccessible.

Protect, relocate, and duplicate vital records and critical business documents. Be sure they are accessible from anywhere.

Install windstorm shutters/plywood over windows and doors.

Apply for or request re-entry credentials from local law enforcement.

Obtain petty cash supply to allow for purchases in the event power or connectivity is lost at merchant locations.

Review your insurance policies to mitigate any possible gaps in coverage.

Close all threatened office locations well in advance to allow time to evacuate if needed.

Before the Hurricane (Continued)

Have contact information for all employees, vendors, and clients on hand.

Use an incident management system, like Agility's Prepara, to keep all parties posted on status updates and next steps.

Consider redirecting your business phones to cell phones in the event of evacuation or office closure through an answering service, Google Voice, or Agility Recovery.

Take the following steps to ensure items outdoors will not blow away or cause damage:

Remove all loose debris.

Anchor or relocate all nonessential equipment to a safe indoor location.

Secure storage of flammable liquid drums, or move them to a sheltered area (but never into main facility areas).

Anchor all portable buildings (e.g., trailers) to the ground.

Secure all heavy equipment.

Make sure outdoor signs are properly braced.

During the Hurricane

Patrol the property continuously and watch for roof leaks, pipe breakage, fire, or structural damage. During the height of a windstorm, personnel should remain in a place that has been identified as safe from wind and flood.

Monitor any equipment that must remain connected to a power source.

Update employees when possible as part of your crisis communications plan.

During power failure, turn off electrical switches to prevent reactivation before necessary checks are completed.

After the Hurricane

Keep listening to radio, TV, or NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards to make sure the storm has passed.

Wait until an area is declared safe before entering to secure the site and survey damage.

Obtain 24-hour security if needed.

Watch for closed roads. If you come upon a barricade or a flooded road, turn around.

Look for safety hazards such as live wires, leaking gas or flammable liquids, poisonous gases, and damage to foundations or underground piping.

Continue to communicate with all key audiences until the crisis has passed. Consistency is important, especially with members of the media.

Call in key personnel and notify contractors to initiate repairs. Make sure safety systems are fully implemented before work is allowed to begin. This means controlling smoking and other open flame sources. Require contractors to share responsibility for establishing fire-safe conditions before and during the job.

Clean roof drains and remove debris from roof to prevent drainage problems.

Following the storm, notify all critical people of next steps, based on damage.

Begin salvage as soon as possible to prevent further damage:

Cover broken windows and torn roof coverings immediately.

Separate damaged goods, but beware of accumulating too much combustible debris inside a building.