

Okaloosa County Hurricane Guide 2021



Cover photo by Northwest Florida Daily News

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2021

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Welcome to the Okaloosa County Hurricane Guide! By referring to this local source of information, you have already invested in the safety of your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Tropical weather is one of the most serious natural threats our County may face.

The content in this hurricane guide has been curated from the Public Safety section and Emergency Management section of MyOkaloosa.com, along with resources from AlertOkaloosa.com. We trust you find this guide helpful for preparing your household long before a storm threatens. While we always hope for the ideal situation of no tropical weather... we also hope you find our tips and resources helpful in providing peace of mind before, during and after the storm in the event we have to shoulder a weather event. In other words, prepare don't panic.

In years past, Florida's Governor has declared a tax-free holiday on hurricane preparedness supplies. Take advantage of the tax-free holiday and create an inventory. For peace of mind, consider an annual disaster supply trip to your local hardware, grocery or home goods retailer. If you've planned ahead, this guide will help you remain cognizant and confident in guiding your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers through the storm.

In the aftermath of any storm, the Okaloosa County Emergency Response Team will be out clearing the streets, helping to restore affected services and checking on you. There are heroes amongst us, shouldering the storm together as a community of one. They will be wearing Sheriff's green, Okaloosa hardhats, steel-toe boots and fluorescent vests. We're in this together. Let us know how we can support you.

If you have feedback or suggestions to help make this guide better, email our County Public Information Officer, April Sarver at OCPPIO@myokaloosa.com. She will be happy to help make this guide even more comprehensive than what we've already prepared. Thank you again for taking an active role in protecting life and property in the event of a storm.

John Hofstad

Okaloosa County Administrator



The Okaloosa County Division of Emergency Management ensures that the county is ready to respond to all man-made or natural disasters including hurricanes. Emergency Management prepares for disaster response year-round, participating in training exercises, continuing education and emergency response simulations to ensure our county is safe when mother nature bears down on us.

The Okaloosa County Emergency Operations Center is located on the campus of Northwest Florida State College in Niceville. The building serves as a hub where emergency personnel can safely remain in the area – even in the event of a category-5 hurricane. The facility makes it possible for the onsite team of responders to be strategically positioned for a swift recovery. It's designed to house local, regional, state and federal response agencies and coordinate recovery efforts so precious resources are used efficiently.

How Can I Receive Information From Officials?



The county has information available to help you and your family before, during and after a storm.

Okaloosa County's Emergency Operations Center is located on the Northwest Florida State College Niceville Campus

Log on to myokaloosa.com/ps/emergency-management for more insight on Okaloosa County Emergency Management or visit AlertOkaloosa.com for a daily situation report.

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Local, national and international media will work with the Public Information Officer at the Emergency Operations Center. The media will learn the latest from the PIO and spread along their conduits of information to you. In an emergency situation, stay tuned to local radio, television and social media outlets for the latest information. Watch our social media such as our Twitter, Facebook and official county correspondence through email and our website. NOAA weather radio also broadcasts continuous

weather reports from the National Weather Service offices in Tallahassee and Mobile.



**Public Safety
Director:
Patrick Maddox**



**Emergency
Management
Chief:
Mike Schwartz**



**EM
Coordinator:
Ken Wolfe**



Hurricane Categories

Saffir Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale

Category 1

74-95 MPH Winds



Category 2

96-110 MPH Winds



Category 3

111-129 MPH Winds



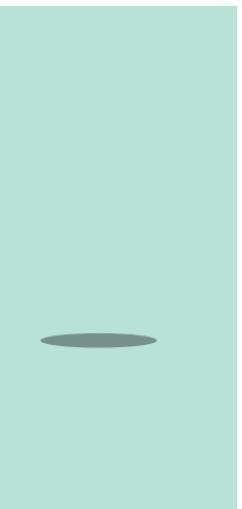
Category 4

130-156 MPH Winds



Category 5

157+ MPH Winds



Some Damage

Damage is Common

Significant Damage

Serious Damage

Widespread Destruction

Hurricane Watches and Warnings



An announcement that hurricane conditions (sustained winds of 74 mph or higher) are possible within the specified coastal area. Because hurricane preparedness activities become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane watch is issued 48 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical-storm-force winds.



An announcement that hurricane conditions (sustained winds of 74 mph or higher) are expected somewhere within the specified coastal area. Because hurricane preparedness activities become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane warning is issued 36 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical-storm-force winds.

Preparation before a storm enters the gulf is the best option. Do not wait until a warning is issued.

Important Phone Numbers



Citizens information line
850.609.7000 or 311



Board of County Commissioners
850.651.7515



Building inspection/Permits/Code
850.651.7180



Dept. of Children and Families
850.595.8200



Law Enforcement (non-emergency)
850.651.7400



Attorney General (Fraud/Gouging)
866.966.7226



Dept. of Environmental Protection
850.245.2118



Florida Dept. of Transportation
850.981.3000



Florida Dept. of Health
850.833.9240



Animal Control
850.243.1525

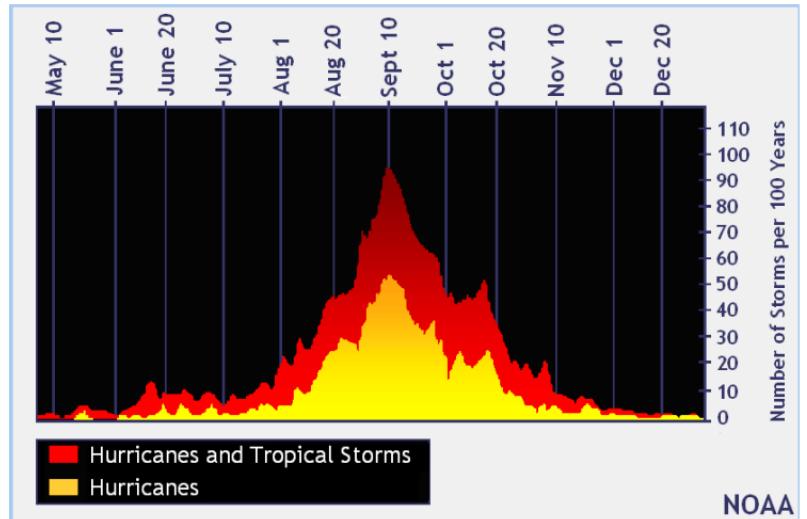


Before a storm is on the horizon

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, September traditionally has had the greatest number of hurricanes in the Atlantic over the last 100 years.

It is advised you watch all storms carefully. Statistically, storms which form off Cape Verde in Africa have a lower chance to reach our area than storms which form later and farther west.

Wind arrival data, which was unofficial in 2017, is now a part of the National Weather Service battery of information provided to the public.



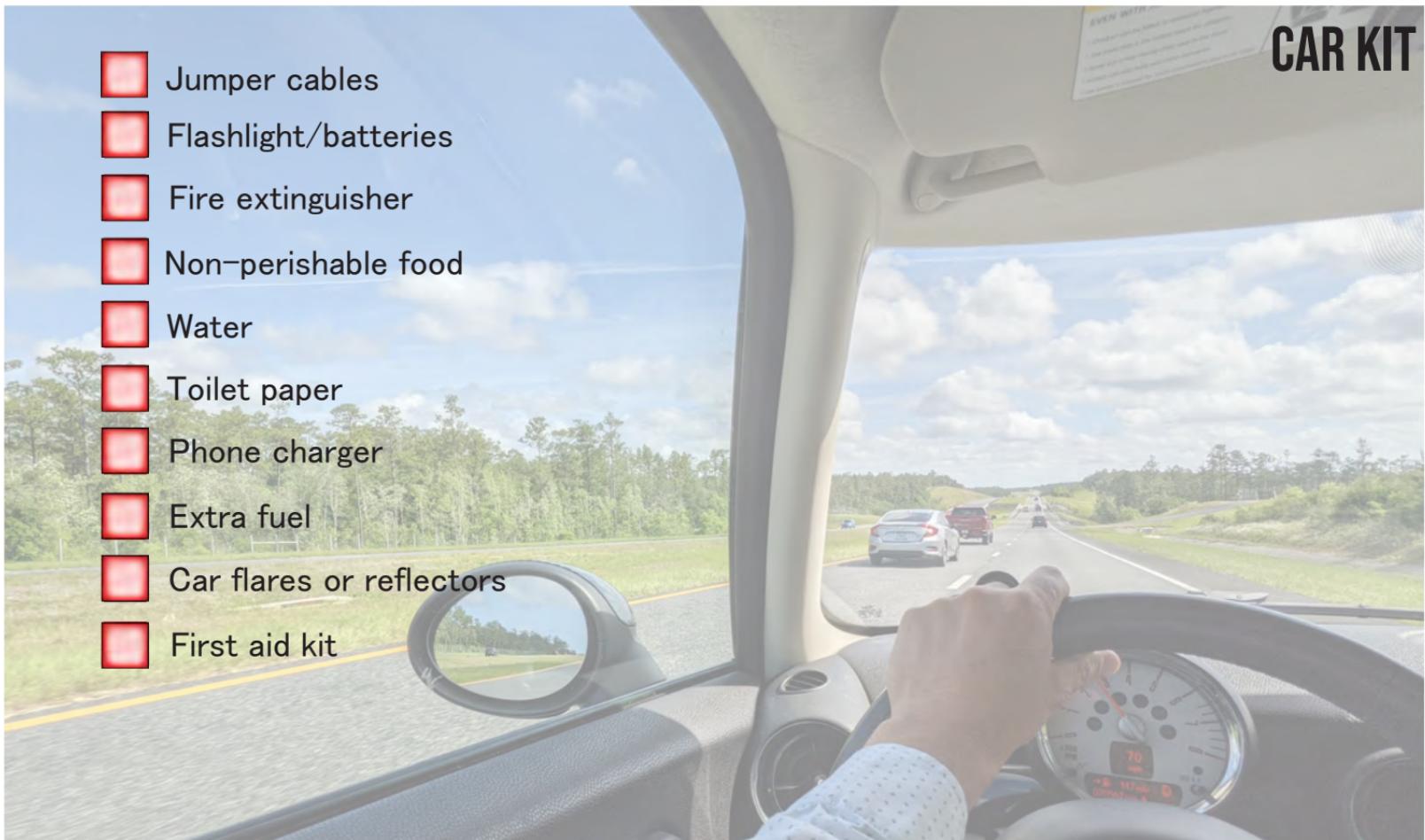
FIRST AID KIT

Before the Storm

- 
- Bandages of all sizes & shapes
 - Sterile gauze dressings
 - 2 sterile eye dressings
 - A variety of different sized bandages
 - Safety pins
 - Disposable sterile gloves
 - Tweezers
 - Scissors
 - Alcohol-free cleansing wipes
 - Bandage tape
 - Digital thermometer
 - Skin rash cream for itching or bug bites
 - Antiseptic cream
 - Pain relief for both adults & children. Aspirin (not for given to children under 16) or ibuprofen
 - Cough medicine
 - Antihistamine cream or tablets
 - Eye wash
 - Distilled water for cleaning wounds
 - Peroxide for additional wound cleaning

CAR KIT

- Jumper cables
- Flashlight/batteries
- Fire extinguisher
- Non-perishable food
- Water
- Toilet paper
- Phone charger
- Extra fuel
- Car flares or reflectors
- First aid kit



EMERGENCY NEEDS KIT

Before the Storm



HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS

Homeowners

It's a good idea to purchase homeowner's insurance before the beginning of hurricane season, which officially begins June 1. Additionally, consider flood insurance, no matter the flood zone in Okaloosa County. Make sure you have an adequate supply of sandbags, plywood or other hurricane preparation supplies or are familiar with availability if a storm threatens. Talk to your homeowner's association about any policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and security of homeowners. Decide which room in your home will serve as a shelter room and keep it clear of clutter so it can be easily accessed in an emergency. Note your outdoor furniture and make sure it is sheltered or moved indoors ahead of time.



Renters

Preparation tips for renters before disaster strikes:

- Have a plan: who will you stay with if you leave your home? If you decide to leave or stay, who will you tell? How often will you check in with them?
- Build a hurricane kit. (instructions are included in this booklet.) Know if you live in an evacuation or a flood zone. Be ready to act if you are told to leave the area.
- Talk to your landlord. What steps are they taking to protect your home? Will they supply protective supplies (shutters, plywood, et al?)
- Renter's personal property isn't covered by a landlord's property insurance. You need to look into personal renter's insurance. Plans may cost as little as \$20 a month.



PLANNING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

When hurricanes hit, people with special or medical needs have additional concerns. Take the following steps if you or someone you love has special or medical needs.

- Have at least, a three-day supply of necessary medical supplies.
- For medical equipment which requires electricity, inquire with your medical supply company and ask about a backup power source such as a battery or a generator. If you use oxygen, have an emergency supply which will last you 72 hours. Make sure the tanks are securely braced. Make copies of medical records and store them in an easily accessible, dry place.
- Store extra batteries for hearing aids, implants, TTY and light phone signaler.

Special Needs Planning Continued...

- Always have a three-day supply of medication on hand. In some emergencies you might need to have enough for at least a week. Store your medicine in one location in their original containers.
- Service animals may become confused, frightened or disoriented during a storm. Keep them confined or securely leashed or harnessed



PET PLANNING

If you are evacuating, your pets should evacuate with you. Pet abandonment is illegal. Pets should not be left in empty houses or be allowed to roam free. Animals left behind could die of starvation, get eaten by predators or eat/drink contaminated food or water.

The first few days after a disaster, it's recommended that you put a leash on your pets when they are outside until they are once again familiar with the area. Familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and your pet may become disoriented and get lost. Furthermore, your pets' behavior may change after a disaster. Normally quiet and friendly pets may become aggressive. Watch your animals closely, especially when outdoors, as predators may move into your area seeking a new habitat. Finally, keep an eye out for downed power lines. You may know they are dangerous, but your pet does not.



While your pool should be low on the list of your concerns when a storm is on its way, there are several things you can do to protect it – if you have time. Do not lower the water level of the pool. Allow the pool to overflow in this situation. This helps keep the pool from being forced out of the ground due to a high-water table.

NEVER completely drain your pool – heavy rains can cause a pool to pop out. Turn off all electrical power to the swimming pool when a storm is forecast. If your pump is open to the sky, remove the motor and seal it in a waterproof plastic bag to preserve it.

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POOL PREPARATION





Remove loose items from the pool area to prevent them from become missile-like debris. Items which are left out can damage the pool or your home.

Add extra chlorine to the pool to prevent contamination – WHILE THIS WATER WILL NOT BE DRINKABLE – it can be used to clean clothes and flush toilets in an emergency. If you have a screened in pool area, remove panels of the screen above the chair rail in order to allow the wind to blow through.

Storm Preparation

Know if you are in an evacuation zone. Our website (direct link in the QR Code) can tell you what evacuation zone you live in. Mobile Home Residents are encouraged to evacuate for all storms. Decide BEFORE hurricane season where you would go in the event of a tropical threat. If you are going to leave, do so as early as you are able. When you leave, don't go hundreds of miles away. Stay as close as you can without being in danger from the storm.



Buy a NOAA weather radio, have a car charger for your phone and keep your gas tank at least half-full during the summer months. Make sure your street address number is clearly marked on your home, so first responders know where to go. Review your insurance policies every May.



Have an evacuation location selected before storm season. Let friends and family know where you are going in the event you decide to evacuate.

Hurricanes are the number one reason for mass evacuations on the Gulf Coast. When evacuation orders are given, residents and visitors must adhere to evacuation guidelines and leave the evacuation zone.

A mandatory evacuation means residents in a specific zone must evacuate the area of danger. It is unwise to stay in a home under a mandatory evacuation order. Subsequently, access to areas under a mandatory evacuation order may be restricted for a period of time after the effects of the hurricane have subsided. Shelters will open in conjunction with Mandatory Evacuation orders. It is important to note that not every shelter will open during an evacuation order. Check with Public Safety if you are unsure about which shelter has opened during an emergency. They are opened based on expected evacuating population. Traffic control measures are instituted by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office when mandatory evacuation orders are issued.

During a recommended evacuation, residents and visitors are encouraged to seek refuge, ideally with family or friends who do not live inside the evacuation zone.

Should I Evacuate?

Once you've determined your risk, decide quickly on your evacuation plans. Remember, bridges are closed by the Florida Department of Transportation once sustained wind speeds pass 40 MPH. If you are evacuating a short distance, the county's main shelter is in Crestview at Davidson Middle School. The shelter has its advantages, including avoiding traffic as others in the area flee the oncoming path of the storm. Remember, leaving does not guarantee the storm will not shift track. It will also be a shorter trek home after the storm if you stay local.



Ask yourself these questions:

Before you decide on your evacuation plans, as the tropical depression, storm or hurricane approaches the Gulf Coast, make sure you are making the best decision for your family and your circumstances.

Do you live in a mobile or manufactured home? If yes, then you should **ALWAYS** evacuate.

Do you need to go to the pet-friendly shelter? Okaloosa County's pet-friendly shelters are Antioch Elementary School, Davidson Middle School and Northwest Florida State College's Raider Arena. REMEMBER: pet friendly, does NOT mean you will be able to keep your pet with you. Other evacuees may have allergies, which means pets and people will have to be separated for the health and wellbeing of others. The Panhandle Animal Welfare Society will check your animal in, and take it to the pet shelter area where they will care for it until you check out of the shelter. No exotic pets are allowed in the shelter.



Photo by Northwest Florida Daily News

If someone has a certified service animal, the animal will be allowed to stay with the owner. Owners will need to bring the service animal's paperwork, their shot records and their service vest with them to the shelter for verification.

Fact: If you live in a home without a foundation, you need to evacuate. Between 1985–2017, 39% of all deaths from tornadoes (which are commonly spawned by hurricanes) were from people who stayed in mobile homes.

Do you require transportation to a shelter? Citizens with special needs should sign up on the Okaloosa County Special Needs Registry and indicate they may need assistance making it to a storm shelter. Prior to any storm making landfall, they or their caregiver must call County Dial-a-Ride at 850.833.9168 and schedule a pick up place and time.

If you decide to stay in your home, plan ahead to have a safe place to shelter. Know where the nearest shelter is and have a plan to get there should the storm warrant your evacuation.

More information is available from floridaevacuates.com



Learn More!



Okaloosa County Transit (EC Rider) will provide transportation to evacuation services in a hurricane situation.

If you decide do evacuate, do so quickly and in daylight if at all possible. Tell someone outside of the warning area where you are going. If you can't get through on a voice call, try texting. Follow official evacuation routes.

- Should something not go as planned, have a plan b.
- Keep your gas tank as full as possible.
- Stay on constant alert for washed out roads or bridges.
- Never drive through standing water, especially at night. It only takes six inches of standing water to sweep a car away.
- While driving, avoid downed power lines.



Photo by Northwest Florida Daily News

When in doubt, log on to floridadisaster.org/evacuation-orders/ for the latest information from the state.

In collaboration with the Okaloosa County School District, Okaloosa County will open up shelters around the county. Evacuation shelters are provided for public use in the event of a hurricane or tropical storm. Shelter openings will be announced through social media, the traditional media and on our website: myokaloosa.com.

Shelter openings will vary depending on the hurricane. If you are unable to find the information via our social media, media reports or are unable to connect to the Internet, call 850.609.7000 or 311 on most phones.

If you decide to stay

Find a reinforced part of your home to seek shelter, such as an interior room without windows, perhaps a closet or bathroom. Listen to local radio and television stations for instructions from the county and for the latest weather updates. Consider offering your home as a place to stay for friends or family members who live in vulnerable coastal areas or mobile homes. Get cash, banks may not be open, and ATMs will not work without electricity. Know where you will go, in case of an evacuation order.



The school district partners with Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners to provide shelter from storms.

Flood Zones v. Evacuation Zones

Flood zones are areas designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for use in the National Flood Insurance Program. These maps show homeowners what their risk is for flooding.

Evacuation zones are based on storm surge estimates supplied by the National Hurricane Center.

Okaloosa County uses a color-coded system to alert people of their evacuation zones. A home could be outside of an evacuation zone but still in a flood zone and vice versa. Knowing your evacuation zone and if you are in a flood zone can save you time and hassle in the future. If you decide to stay, despite an evacuation order, you need to know there is a good chance you will be on your own for several days and no one will be able to help you or your family, no matter how desperate your situation is. YOUR LIFE IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS. First responders WILL NOT leave their stations during the passing of a storm. Furthermore, after the immediate aftermath of the storm, the vast majority of first responders will be at work clearing debris from the roads so they can travel to emergencies. This will almost certainly cause delays in response time.

Know your zone! scan the QR Code to Learn More!



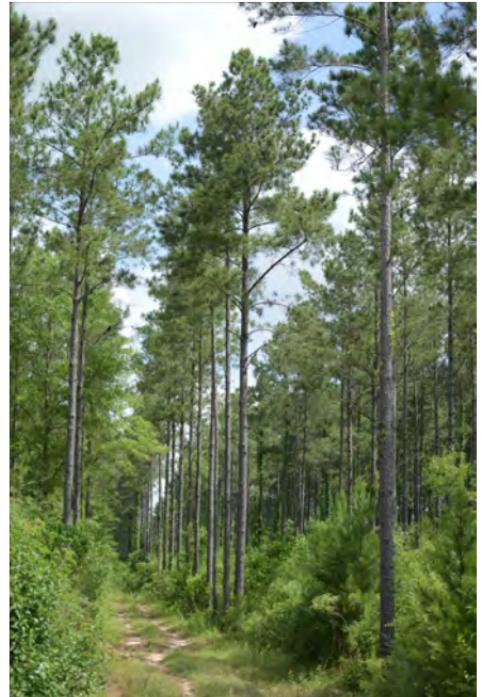
PREVENTING DAMAGE

Tree Damage

Inspect your trees annually. Look for cracks in the trunks or major limbs. Know what kind of trees you have on your property. Sand and live oaks, sabal palms and southern magnolias do well against the forces of mother nature. Don't cut your branches back to the stubs. The trees will grow back with less strength and are more likely to become projectiles during a storm, according to the International Society of Arboriculture.

Flood Damage

The best thing you can do to avoid damage to your home is elevate it. Most types of homes can be elevated above floodwaters. Ideally, if you are building a home, it should elevate above the level at which a presumed '100-year flood' could not reach it.



Wind Damage

Roofs Ensure your roof covering and the sheathing it attaches to will resist high winds.

Gables Brace the end of the wall of a gable roof properly, to resist high winds.

Garage Doors Because of their size and the way they are built, they're easily damaged in a storm. Some doors can be reinforced with aftermarket kits.

Exterior Doors and Windows The exterior walls, doors and windows are the protective shell of your home. You can protect your home by strengthening doors and windows.

Entry Doors Make certain your doors have at least three hinges and a deadbolt security lock with a bolt at least one inch long. Anchor door frames securely to wall framing.

Patio Doors Sliding glass doors are more vulnerable to wind damage so make sure to install shutters or impact-resistant patio doors.



BEFORE YOU ARE IN THE ‘CONE OF UNCERTAINTY’

Storm Prep

Residents of the Florida Gulf Coast should keep an eye on every storm that forms during hurricane season. When a storm forms, weather forecasters will start talking about the “forecast cone” or “cone of uncertainty.” This cone, measured out to three or five days, gives the most likely projected path of the storm to help emergency managers and citizens figure out what their next step needs to be. Because the storm’s landfall is still imprecise, all people who live in the cone should begin preparations as if the storm was coming to their doorstep.





Above: NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Mission Statement:

"To understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts, to share that knowledge and information with others, and to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. Dedicated to the understanding and stewardship of the environment."

Have a plan. Know how you are going to take care of the elderly or children you are responsible for. Additionally, have a plan for your pets. Make and store an emergency supply kit. Understand ‘watch’ and ‘warning’ terms. Make sure you know your evacuation zone and have a NOAA weather radio.

Trim trees and shrubs around your home and document your possessions for insurance purposes. Make sure your property is securable. If possible, purchase storm shutters to put over the windows of your home. If storm shutters aren’t an option, fit and cut marine plywood over your home’s windows. Brace double entry garage doors. Purchase extra gas tanks if possible to keep emergency supplies of gasoline.

Use the gasoline in the tanks at the end of the storm season every December. Gas goes bad after about a year; you will need to replenish your supply accordingly. Refill your prescriptions, especially if they are something you cannot live without. Finally, test your generator on the first of June every year. Better to know it doesn’t work and have to buy a new one than to have a broken one during a storm.

What to do if a warning is issued



36 Hours out: Emergency Management will begin to issue warnings
Stay tuned to local news, have your battery-powered radio ready



Turn off utilities if instructed to do so



Turn off electricity if your home is prone to flooding



Put refrigerator at coldest setting



Turn off appliances to avoid a power surge later



If evacuations are ordered, see if you are included in the order



5 DAYS AHEAD OF THE STORM

-  Review and update your plan
-  Take photos inside and outside of your house
-  Clear out your yard
-  Get your hurricane kit ready
-  Look over your special needs plan
-  Know your evacuation plan

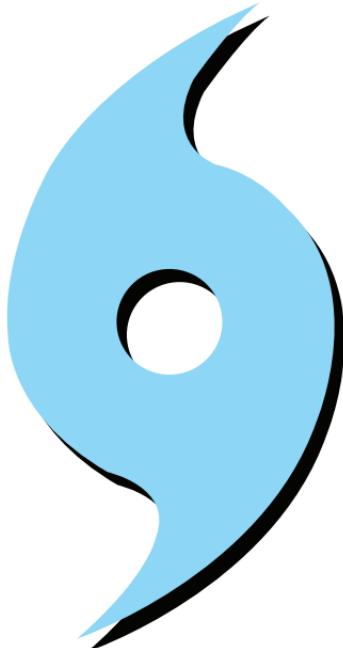
3 DAYS BEFORE THE STORM ARRIVES

Storm Prep

- The three-day cone is much more accurate
- Make any last-minute necessary purchases
- Shutter your windows
- Continue to watch forecasts for track changes
- Double check your hurricane kit
- Gather supplies for the elderly, children and pets
- Finish prep two days before the storm hits
- If you live in a mobile or trailer home, evacuate



A final check Did you remember to...



- Fill containers and tubs with water
- Secure papers, valuables
- Get a full tank of gas
- Get cash
- Refill all meds
- Storm prep boats
- Prepare "go-bag" for shelter/evacuation
- Secure home for evacuation

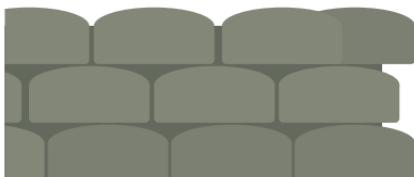


Closing the Beaches

It is the beach safety division's responsibility to keep the shores of the Emerald Coast safe for locals and visitors alike year-round. This includes crises like Hurricanes and Tropical Storms. Beach Safety Division Chief Rich Huffnagle will close down the beaches by flying a double red flag once the storm is close enough to our shores to generate rip currents and dangerous waves. When double red flags are flying, the beaches are closed to swimmers for their protection and the safety of the lifeguards.

Placing Sand Bags

If flooding is imminent, Okaloosa County will distribute sandbags at their north and south end Public Works Yards on Ferdon Boulevard in Crestview and Hollywood Boulevard in Fort Walton Beach. Fill sandbags with heavy-bodied or sandy soil, not fine sand or gravel. Using



Left: Sand bags can be a crucial part of your home's defense against floodwaters

Right: As the storm nears Okaloosa County's shores, the Beach Safety Division will close the beaches of Okaloosa Island. Destin Beach Safety, a division of the City of Destin makes a separate decision about Destin Beaches.

sandbags, which are properly filled, and placed may divert water around instead of through buildings, but they don't flood-proof your house. Only fill a sandbag 2/3 of the way to the top and tie it securely. This makes the bag more malleable and more effective in preventing the flow of water. Polypropylene bags are the preferred bag to use, but burlap will work.

First, place a waterproof canvas down and place sandbags in an overlapping pattern when deploying them. Place the first layer of bags lengthwise and lap the bags so the filled portion of one bag lies on the unified portion of the next. Place the second layer perpendicular to the first and limit placement to two layers unless a building is used as a backing. Finally, remember to place the sandbags with the folded top of the bag in the upstream or uphill position to prevent the bags from opening when water runs by them.

Remember, sandbags will NOT seal out water and they deteriorate as they repeatedly get exposed to wind and water. To increase their lives, add one part of cement to ten parts of sand as a mixture and pour it into the bag.

Securing Your Boat

Each boat owner needs to prepare their specific plan for the type of boat they have as a storm threatens. Never stay on your boat during a hurricane or tropical storm. Seek advice from local marinas. They can advise you on the best way to protect your boat through a storm in a specific area.

Remove small boats from the water and move them to a secure location. If your boat is too large to be removed from the water, move it to a protected harbor before the storm approaches. Double up and secure mooring lines and secure all hatches and portals and cover windscreens. Take down masts, if possible. Remove all loose items from decks and mooring area. Leave nothing unsecured.



WHAT TO BRING TO A SHELTER

- Clothes
- Rain gear
- Toiletries
- Sleeping bag
- Identification
- Prescriptions
- Entertainment
- Special dietary needs
- Insurance cards

DO NOT BRING THESE ITEMS

- Weapons
- Alcohol/Illegal drugs



Evacuation shelters are provided for public use in the event an evacuation becomes necessary and if you have no other place to go. It's recommended that other arrangements be made with a friend or a relative who lives in a well-constructed home, out of the evacuation area, and properly protected to withstand hurricane-force winds. You will be more comfortable and feel less crowded among friends.

Learn to shut off utilities

After a disaster, your utilities may be disrupted or disconnected. You may need to turn off your gas, water or other utilities without aid from a professional. Make sure all adults in the home know how to turn off utilities to the house. In addition, make sure the shut-off valves are unobstructed. There are different procedures for turning off gas in different places. If you turn off the gas for any reason, you should only allow a qualified professional to turn it back on again. NEVER attempt to turn the gas on again by yourself.

Don't drink water straight from the faucet after a storm, unless the department of health says it is OK.

If you hear reports of contamination from OKALOOSA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, you may want to shut off your water after a hurricane to prevent sickness. To close the incoming water source, locate the incoming valve and turn it to the closed position.

To use the water in your pipes, let air into the plumbing by turning on the faucet in your home at the highest level. A small amount of water will trickle out. Then obtain water from the lowest faucet in the home.



To use the water in your hot water tank, be sure the electricity or gas is off and open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the tank's water intake valve and turning on the hot water faucet. Refill the tank before turning the gas or electricity back on.



For safety's sake, always shut off all individual circuits before shutting off the main circuit breaker.

During the Storm

During the storm, the first thing you will need to do is remain calm. It will take several hours for the storm to pass completely. Remain in an interior room, such as a closet, hallway or a bathroom, of a sturdy building. This room should be a structure away from windows. While you are taking cover, make sure you have a disaster kit nearby. Close all exterior and interior doors. If the eye of the storm passes, it will be calm for a SHORT period of time.

REMAIN INDOORS. As soon as the eye passes over, winds will increase dramatically from the opposite direction. Mobile and manufactured housing is not a place to ride out the storm. All who live in a mobile home should take shelter with a family member or a friend. Additionally, people who live in these structures should have gone through their yards and collected any and all loose items to prevent projectile damage from the storm.

Managing Anxiety

Being able to cope with stress and uncertainty is a wonderful skill to have in everyday life, exponentially more so during a hurricane or tropical storm.

The ‘eye’ of the storm (seen in the middle of the model below) is very calm and will give the impression that the storm has passed. It hasn’t. Stay indoors!



It is normal to feel apprehension as a storm approaches. Anticipate physical and emotional changes immediately before, during and after a storm makes landfall. Attempt to limit your exposure to graphic news stories by limiting the amount of time you consume the news. Check-in regularly, but do not keep the television on or compulsively refresh your social media pages. Get accurate, timely information from reliable sources. As a storm approaches land anywhere in the U.S., we see an increase in false or misleading sources. Vet the source you are reading or watching. If you haven't heard of the news 'outlet' before, chances are you are not reading something from a reliable source.



In order to reduce stress, limit the amount of time you spend watching graphic news stories.

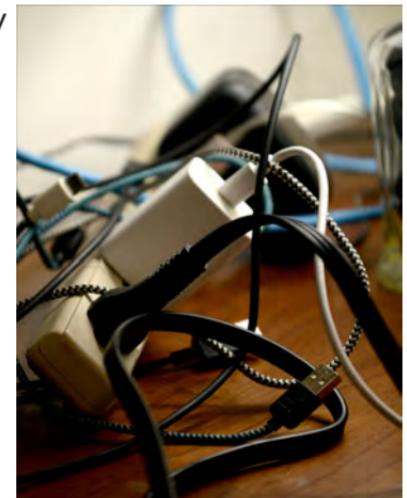
Maintain your normal routine as much as possible. Try to sleep eight hours a night and eat regular, balanced meals. Avoid drugs and excessive drinking, you need to be alert and prepared to react at all times. Stay active physically and mentally. Read a book, do push-ups and call your friends and family to let them know your status often. Laugh! Keeping a sense of humor helps reduce the level of stress you are under.

Finally, if you are feeling stress, tell someone. Talk the situation out with a family member or trusted friend.

During the Storm

A storm can cause a widespread loss of electrical power throughout a system for an extended period of time.

- **Prepare a power outage kit.** For short outages, consider using glow sticks, flashlights and a battery-powered radio, extra batteries and a wind-up clock.
- **If you use life-sustaining electrical equipment,** pre-register with the special needs shelter. Consider purchasing a small generator or know where to rent one if you use life sustaining equipment that requires electrical power.
- **Have a cell phone and a way to charge it.**
- **If you own an electric garage door,** make sure you know how to open it properly without power. Prepare a power outage kit.
- **Unplug computers** and other voltage-sensitive equipment, as well as appliances to reduce initial demand when power is restored.
- **When you install a home generator,** follow the manufacturer's instructions and have it inspected by the utility company.



If you lose power, unplug anything in an outlet -this will prevent an overload of power when electricity turns back on.



- If you decide to evacuate, unplug or turn off your heat-producing appliances, such as stoves, irons or heaters.
- Stay away from downed power lines and call 911 to report them. Conserve water, especially if you are on a well system.
- Keep doors, windows and curtains closed to retain heat in your home if the outage occurs late in the hurricane season.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed, especially in the summer. IF the doors remain closed, food in a fully loaded freezer can remain edible for two days. Carefully check thawed food for contamination.
- Be careful around candles or other flammable light sources.
- When using Kerosene heaters, gas lanterns or stoves inside houses, maintain ventilation to avoid a buildup of toxic fumes.
- **NEVER PLACE A GENERATOR INDOORS** – They should remain outdoors to prevent poisoning from toxic fumes.

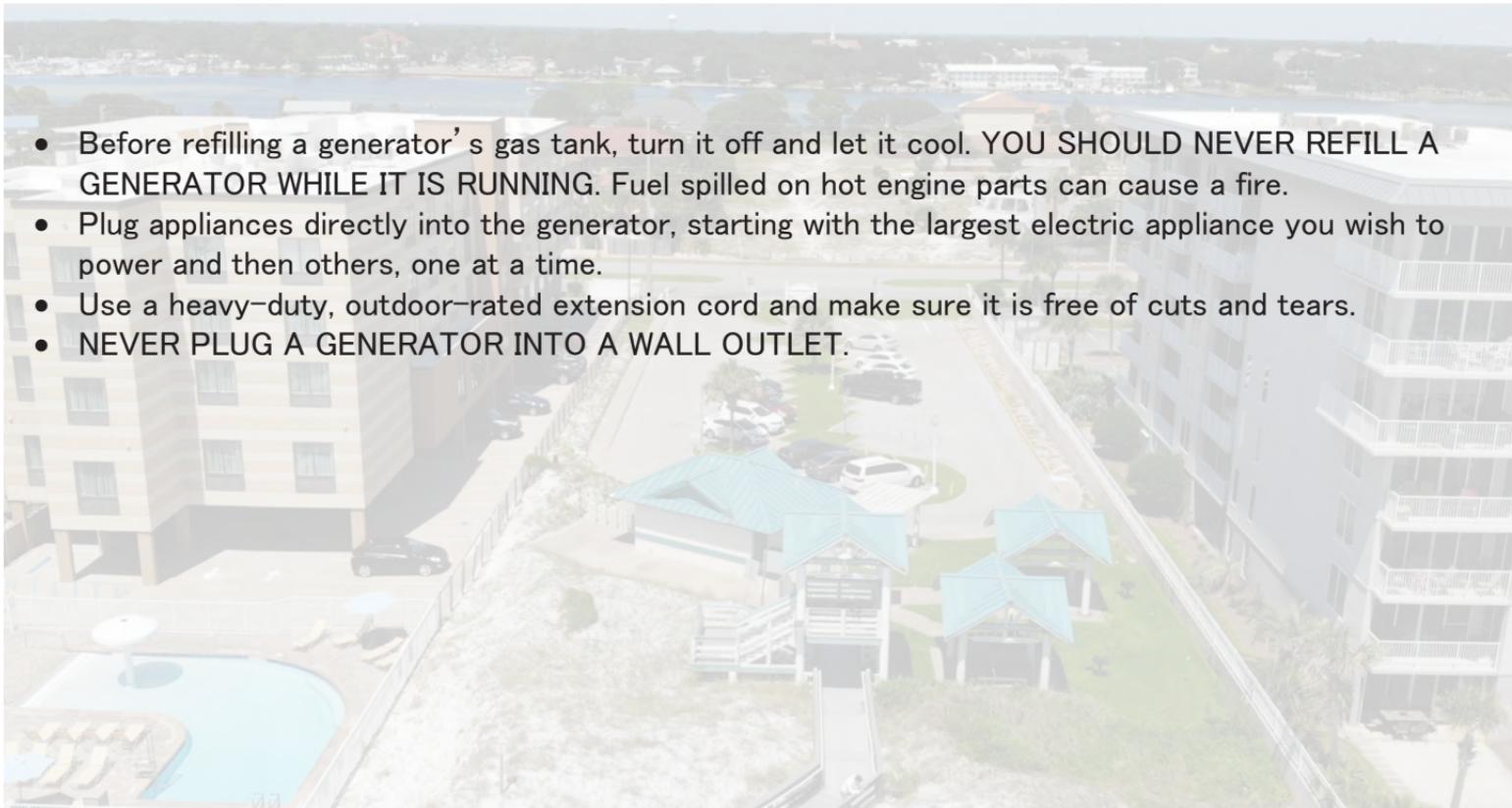
Generator Safety

Before you operate a generator, make sure you follow these steps and have the tools you need to operate it safely.

- Have a Carbon Monoxide detector on hand to protect yourself from the dangerous, odorless chemical which is produced by generators.
- Have extra gas cans on-site, so you can continue to operate your generator for as long as necessary.
- Store the gasoline in a well-ventilated area that is not a utility room. If you don't have a suitable place to store gasoline, build or buy a cabinet to place outside of your home.
- Check your gas tanks for leaks once a month.
- Fuel stabilizer helps give gasoline a longer shelf life.
- Always use extension cords to run indoor appliances with a generator. You should never bring a generator inside.



- Before refilling a generator's gas tank, turn it off and let it cool. **YOU SHOULD NEVER REFILL A GENERATOR WHILE IT IS RUNNING.** Fuel spilled on hot engine parts can cause a fire.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator, starting with the largest electric appliance you wish to power and then others, one at a time.
- Use a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord and make sure it is free of cuts and tears.
- **NEVER PLUG A GENERATOR INTO A WALL OUTLET.**



After the Storm Passes

After the storm, wait until the area is declared safe before going outside.

In an emergency situation, all employees from public safety, to emergency management and veteran services are mobilized to put our community back together.

After the Storm

Stay off the roads unless absolutely necessary. Debris could inundate the roadways making it impossible to pass. Emergency Management crews will work to clear up all roads but some roads may be closed for your protection; resulting in necessary detours. If you evacuated, only return home when authorities have said it is safe to do so. When you get home, check on your neighbors. If your home is safe, then make any necessary temporary repairs. Take photos of any damage to send to your insurance company. Don't drive into flooded areas and beware of any standing water. Additionally, be on the lookout for any downed power lines near water.



The lines can electrify the water, injuring you, a family member or a pet. Look out for insects, snakes or scared animals which may have been driven to higher ground. Enter your home cautiously. Use a flashlight to look around. Do not use any sort of open flame. Once you have inspected your home, begin removing shutters or plywood, checking gas, water and electrical lines. Check local media for boil water notices and throw out any spoiled food.

PODs

After a hurricane or tropical storm, the county, state or federal government may choose to open points-of distribution, or PODs. This service will be run by county employees who are responding in the immediate aftermath of a storm in Okaloosa County. These access zones are where you will be able to pick up food and water to help you recover from the storm. These facilities will only be opened if another commercial facility, like a grocery store, is not available to the public immediately after a weather event. The number and locations of PODs will therefore vary from situation to situation..

County Employees will staff the Points of Distribution in Okaloosa County. Annual training ensures they can perform duties as assigned.



There are two primary ways to make water drinkable:

1.) Boiling: If water is unsafe because of contamination from flooding, boiling is the best method.

Fill a pot with water after straining it through a coffee filter or cheesecloth to remove dirt and other particles. Bring the water to a rolling boil and boil for three minutes. Pour the water into a disinfected drinking container after it has cooled. Store in the refrigerator, if possible.

2.) Bleach Treatment: If you are unable to boil water, the next-best method is to use an appropriate amount of bleach to clean the water. Strain water through a coffee filter or cheesecloth to remove larger particles. Use gallon-sized containers to calculate the correct chlorine bleach solution. Pour a mixture of 1/8 teaspoon or 16 drops of pure, unscented, household chlorine bleach into a gallon-size, purified drinking container. Let this stand at least 30 minutes before drinking the water.



If the water is still cloudy after 30 minutes, add an additional 1/8 teaspoon or 16 drops of chlorine bleach to the gallon-sized container and let the water stand another 30 minutes. Remember, an excessive amount of bleach is poisonous.

Extreme Heat

The most intense hurricanes, that threaten our area, take place during the hottest months. Since power outages are common during these events, the threat of heat-related illnesses is quite high. Avoiding heat-related sicknesses requires preparation. Long before extreme heat presents, install window-mounted air conditioners and insulate them when necessary. Check air conditioning ducts for proper insulation. Install temporary window reflectors, like aluminum foil-covered cardboard to reflect heat and cover windows that receive morning or afternoon sun with drapes, shades, awnings or louvers. Outdoor awnings can reduce the heat that enters the home by up to 80%. Finally, install storm-rated windows in your home.

During hot weather, stay indoors as much as possible and limit sun exposure. Stay on the lowest level of your home if air conditioning isn't available. Spend the warmest part of the day at a public place with power and dress in lightweight, light-colored clothing.

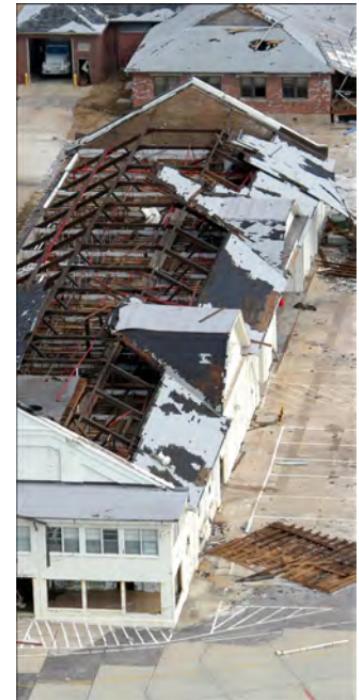
If you must go outside, wear sunscreen and re-apply hourly. Be sure to apply to dry skin. Wear a hat and sunglasses. Never leave a pet or child in an unattended vehicle.



Eat light, balanced and healthy meals in addition to drinking large amounts of water. Remember to check in on elderly or disabled family friends and neighbors.

Clean up

- Call professional arborists for large uprooted trees.
- Use proper safety gear, such as heavy gloves, boots, and safety goggles and long-sleeved shirts and pants. Wear a hat and use sunscreen.
- Drink plenty of water and rest often.
- Lift with your legs, not with your back.
- If you can't ID something, don't touch it.
- Be wary of downed power lines.
- DO NOT burn trash or yard debris. Low water pressure and blocked roads may keep the fire department from reaching you if any controlled burns get out of control.



Final Words

Preparation is the key to surviving a tropical event on the Gulf Coast. It means preparing long before a storm threatens, making common-sense decisions, obeying lawful orders and knowing the dangers associated with storms.

The well-being of Okaloosa County Citizens is critical and we're prepared to respond. If you have questions, concerns or are just unsure of what to expect, give our office a call at 850.689.5030.

Connect with us:



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A Publication of the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners



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