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Safety Tips for Hurricanes

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Safety Tips for Hurricanes

For Those Who Haven't Felt the Force of a Hurricane

It was pleasant--a breezy Indian Summer evening. As the hurricane approached the beautiful bay, long-time residents sat on their patios and sipped tall drinks. The last hurricane was only a dim 22-year old memory. The storms broke their once-every-six-year average of hitting the coast long ago. When they did hit, it never amounted to more than a splash of water blown up to the property lines or porch steps. Evacuate in response to civil defense sirens and radio warnings? Why bother? They were having too much fun!

But by morning the bridge was out. They were stuck. Record winds shredded their homes splinter by splinter, as they cowered in upper floor back bedrooms, hiding under mattresses.

They tried to concentrate on shutterless flashbacks of their lives as they waited in terror for the end. Then the storm surge plowed inland, its giant wind-driven waves over 20 feet high, strewing devastation, and finishing what the wind had started.

This could happen to you.

Enter the Season Prepared

If you live in a coastal area, identify your **evacuation** route. Your community's hurricane **evacuation** plan includes designated safe areas, areas to be evacuated during a hurricane **emergency**, and safe **evacuation** routes to shelter. Get information on **emergency** planning in your area by contacting your local civil defense or **emergency** services office.

Hurricanes can cause extensive flooding, not just along the coastline, but far inland as well. Flood insurance is valuable financial protection. You should be aware, however, that your homeowner's policy does not cover damage from flooding. Check into the availability of flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program by contacting your local insurance agent or broker.

Your annual preparations for the hurricane season should include checking to see that you have a supply of non-perishable food, drinking water containers, candles, waterproof matches, a lantern and fuel, first aid kit, fire extinguisher, battery-powered radio, flashlights, and extra batteries.

Advisories and Warnings

Thanks to modern detection and tracking devices, the National Weather Service can usually provide 12 to 24 hours of advance warning. Advisories are issued by the Weather Service of NOAA when hurricanes approach land.

A "hurricane watch" is issued whenever a hurricane becomes a threat to coastal areas. Everyone in the area covered by the "watch" should listen for further advisories and be prepared to act promptly if a hurricane warning or **evacuation** order is issued.

A "hurricane warning" is issued when hurricane winds of 74 miles an hour or higher, or a combination of dangerously high water and very rough seas, are expected in a specific coastal area within 24 hours. Precautionary actions should begin immediately.

Getting Ready for the Hurricane

- Keep tuned to a local radio or television station for the latest National Weather Service advisories as well as special instructions from local government.
- Check battery-powered equipment. Your battery-operated radio could be your only source of information, and flashlights will be needed if utility services are interrupted. Buy extra batteries.
- Keep your car fueled should **evacuation** be necessary. Also, service stations may be inoperable after the storm strikes.
- Store drinking water in clean bathtubs, jugs, bottles and cooking utensils as your town's water system may be contaminated or damaged by the storm. Obtain extra prescription medications and medical supplies.
- Board up windows or protect them with storm shutters. Windows are broken mainly from wind-driven debris. Wind pressure may break large windows, garage doors and double entry doors.
- Secure outdoor objects that might become debris. Garbage cans, garden tools, toys, signs, porch furniture, and a number of other harmless items become deadly missiles in hurricane winds.
- Moor your boat securely well before the storm arrives, or move it to a designated safe area early. Do not stay on the boat or you may drown.
- If you live inland away from the beaches and low-lying coastal areas, your home is well constructed, and local authorities have not called for **evacuation** in your area, stay home and make **emergency** preparations.
- Be alert for tornado watches and warnings as tornadoes are often spawned by hurricanes. Should your area receive a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately in an interior bathroom or small hall, preferably below ground level.

During the Hurricane

Remain indoors during the hurricane. Blowing debris can injure and kill. Travel is extremely dangerous. Be especially wary of the "eye" of the hurricane. If the storm center passes directly overhead, there will be a lull in the wind lasting from a few minutes to half-an-hour or more. At the other side of the "eye" the winds will increase rapidly to hurricane force, and will come from the opposite direction.

After the Hurricane Has Passed

If you are in a public shelter, remain there until informed by those in charge that it is safe to leave.

Keep tuned to your local radio or television station for advice and instructions from local government about **emergency** medical, food, housing, and other forms of assistance.

Stay out of disaster areas which could be dangerous and where your presence will interfere with essential rescue and recovery work. Do not use the telephone except for rescue, serious injuries or emergencies.

Do not drive unless you must. Roads should be left clear for **emergency** vehicles and debris filled streets are dangerous. Along the coast, soil may be washed from beneath the pavement or bridge supports, which could collapse under the weight of a car.

Avoid loose or dangling wires, and report them to your power company or local police or fire department. Report broken sewer, gas, or water mains to the appropriate utility company or service authority.

Prevent fires. Do not use candles. Check buildings for possible collapse before re-entry.

Hurricanes moving inland can cause severe flooding. Stay away from river banks and streams until all potential flooding is past.

If power has been off, check refrigerated food for spoilage. Do not use tap or well water until you are sure it is not contaminated.

Make your plans and preparations for a hurricane **emergency** the subject of a family discussion. Share your family's plans with friends and relatives. Hurricane preparedness is a team effort for everyone in the neighborhood and community.

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LEAVE EARLY from low-lying beach areas that may be swept by high tides or storm waves. Leave mobile homes for more substantial shelter--they are particularly vulnerable to overturning in strong winds.

BE AWARE that some areas may flood long before the arrival of the storm. Your escape may be further complicated by the fact that high density of population of some areas may require **evacuation** orders to be issued earlier than one day before the storm's arrival. Don't get caught by the hurricane in your car on an open coastal road.

If local government advises **evacuation** of your area, **DO SO IMMEDIATELY**. Keep your car radio on to listen for further instructions, such as the location of **emergency** shelters.