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Agency News

TDCJ prepares for 2015 Atlantic hurricane season

This year's Atlantic hurricane season has seen six named storms develop to date and the current outlook predicts a below average hurricane season due to a developing strong El Nino. Colorado State University and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have lowered their forecasts for hurricane activity in the Atlantic Ocean basin as El Nino, a warming of the Pacific Ocean waters off the northern South American west coast, leads to strong easterly trade winds and increased wind shear that inhibit development of tropical cyclone activity. However, it only takes one hurricane to hit your home or workplace for it to feel like an active year.

While the agency's front line employees always deal directly with inclement weather, TDCJ relies on effective emergency planning to continue operations with minimal disruption. The Office of Incident Management, in coordination with the Correctional Institutions Division and other agency divisions, oversees TDCJ's emergency preparedness and response activities.

TDCJ prepares for the annual hurricane season, which typically peaks from August

to October, through careful emergency response planning, effective staff training and other appropriate measures. TDCJ's Office of Incident Management, in coordination with the Correctional Institutions Division and other agency divisions, oversees the agency's emergency preparedness and response activities for weather-related and other types



of emergencies. OIM oversees the agency's emergency response and continuity of operations plans, and trains agency staff on specific emergency response roles. OIM also oversees some transport activities for the State Emergency Management Plan, which includes management of a wide variety of state transportation assets. OIM and other agency representatives coordinate emergen-

cy response activities that involve everything from the evacuation of offenders to the delivery of provisions to affected facilities.

When there's a chance that a hurricane might threaten Texas, OIM monitors the storm's approach and keeps senior agency staff aware of its strength and where it might make landfall. If TDCJ operations might be threatened, central command staff meets in Huntsville to begin response planning. Throughout the emergency, OIM maintains communications with senior agency managers and other appropriate groups.

While the OIM and Emergency Command Center coordinate TDCJ's emergency response, the agency's front line staff members might be responsible for logistical challenges ranging from evacuation of thousands of offenders to delivering emergency provisions, all while maintaining security. Despite the obstacles nature throws their way, TDCJ employees routinely rise to the occasion and ensure the agency's vital public safety mission is achieved.

When the storm has passed, OIM coordinates with the Business and Finance Divi-

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sion to seek reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for storm-related costs incurred by TDCJ, which can run into millions of dollars.

Everyone living in an area where a tropical storm might strike should know what to do in the event of a hurricane. This is especially important for public safety professionals including police, firefighters, EMS and other medical care providers, as well as some TDCJ staff members who must continue to provide critical services during weather conditions which will close most businesses and may require evacuation of their family for an

undetermined period of time. In some cases, TDCJ employees from unaffected areas of the state may report to potential impact areas so local staff members have time to evacuate their family and prepare their personal property before the storm hits.

Typically, the best plan is to evacuate if instructed to do so by authorities. “Run from water and hide from wind” are good rules to follow during tropical storms. Storm surge and flooding are usually more significant threats than wind, and even a small category hurricane can cause a large storm surge. It’s important to have evacuation plans in place

and to take evacuation orders seriously and www.ready.gov is a great website for help with preparedness planning.

If you do not evacuate and must stay in place to ride out a hurricane, make sure you have a supply kit on hand. This kit should include several days’ worth of drinkable water and nonperishable foods, any special foods for infants or the elderly, personal toiletries and medicines, blankets and pillows, a first aid kit, flashlight and batteries, fully-charged cell phones and a battery-operated NOAA weather radio. ●