

Safety Circular

Hurricane Safety and Awareness

June 2024

Hurricanes are among nature's most powerful and destructive phenomena. On average, 12 tropical storms, 6 of which become hurricanes, form over the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, or Gulf of Mexico during the hurricane season which runs from June 1st to November 30th each year.

Hurricane Hazards

While hurricanes pose the greatest threat to life and property, tropical storms and depressions can also be devastating. The primary hazards from tropical cyclones (which include tropical depressions, tropical storms, and hurricanes) are storm surge flooding, inland flooding from heavy rain, destructive winds, tornadoes and high surf and rip currents.

- Storm surge is the abnormal rise of water generated by a storm's winds. This hazard is historically the leading cause of hurricane related deaths in the United States. Storm surge and large battering waves can result in large loss of life and cause massive destruction along the coast.
- Storm surge can travel several miles inland, especially along bays, rivers, and estuaries.
- Flooding from heavy rains is the second leading cause of fatalities from landfalling tropical cyclones. Widespread torrential rains associated with these storms often cause flooding hundreds of miles inland. This flooding can persist for several days after a storm has dissipated.
- Winds from a hurricane can destroy buildings and manufactured homes. Signs, roofing material, and other items left outside can become flying missiles during hurricanes.
- Tornadoes can accompany landfalling tropical cyclones. These tornadoes typically occur in rain bands well away from the center of the storm.
- Dangerous waves produced by a tropical cyclone's strong winds can pose a significant hazard to coastal residents and mariners. These waves can cause deadly rip currents, significant beach erosion, and damage to structures along the coastline, even when the storm is more than a 1,000 miles offshore.

Prepare in Advance

- Assemble an emergency preparedness kit.
- Create a household evacuation plan that includes your pets.
- Stay informed about your community's risk and response plans.
- Educate your family about what to do if a hurricane strikes. Discussing hurricanes ahead of time helps reduce fear, particularly for younger children.
- Keep insurance policies, documents, and other valuables in a safe-deposit box. You may need quick, easy access to these documents. Keep them in a safe place less likely to be damaged if a hurricane causes flooding. Take pictures on a phone and keep copies of important documents and files on a flash-drive that you can carry with you on your house or car keys.
- Prepare a pet emergency kit for your companion animals.

Right Before a Hurricane

- Listen to local area radio, weather radio or TV stations for the latest information and updates.
- Be prepared to evacuate quickly and know your routes and destinations. Find a local emergency shelter.
- Check your emergency kit and replenish any items missing or in short supply, especially medications or other medical supplies. Keep it nearby.
- Fill plastic bottles with clean water for drinking.
- Fill bathtubs and sinks with water for flushing the toilet or washing the floor or clothing.
- Fill your car's gas tank, in case an evacuation notice is issued.
- Bring in anything that can be picked up by the wind, such as bicycles and patio furniture.
- Move your furniture and valuables to the higher floors of your home.
- Turn off utilities if told to do so by authorities to prevent damage to your home or within the community. If you shut your gas off, a professional is required to turn it back on.
- Unplug small appliances to reduce potential damage from power surges that may occur.

Staying Safe During a Hurricane

- Stay indoors and away from windows.
- Do not walk on beaches, riverbanks or in flood waters.
- Use flashlights in the dark if the power goes out. Do NOT use candles.
- Continue listening to local area radio, weather radio or TV stations for the latest information and updates.
- Avoid contact with floodwater. It may be contaminated with sewage or contain dangerous insects or animals.
- Turn off the power and water mains if instructed to do so by local authorities.
- Do not walk, swim or drive through floodwater. Just six inches of fast-flowing water can knock you over and two feet will float a car.
- If caught on a flooded road with rapidly rising waters, get out of the car quickly and move to higher ground.

- Stay out of areas subject to flooding. Underpasses, dips, low spots, canyons, washes, etc. can become filled with water.

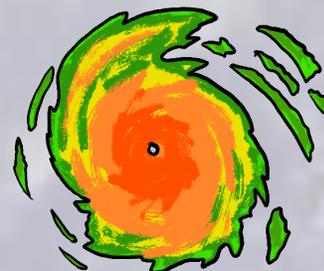
After a Hurricane

- Let friends and family know you are safe. Register yourself as safe on the Safe and Well website.
- If evacuated, return only when authorities say it is safe to do so.
- Continue listening to local area radio, weather radio or TV stations for the latest information and updates.
- Stay alert for extended rainfall and subsequent flooding.
- Stay out of any building that has water around it.
- Keep away from loose or dangling power lines. Report them immediately to the power company.
- Take pictures of home damage, both the building and its contents, for insurance purposes.
- Help people who require additional assistance, such as infants, elderly people, those without transportation, large families who may need additional help in an emergency situation, people with disabilities, and the people who care for them.

Clean Up

Take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones during your cleanup after a hurricane, flood, or other natural disaster. Following these cleanup tips can help to prevent an accident, such as slips, trips, and falls, and avoid exposure to dangerous bacteria:

- Floodwater can contain dangerous bacteria from overflowing sewage, agricultural and industrial waste. While skin contact with floodwater does not pose a serious health risk by itself, eating or drinking anything contaminated with floodwater can cause diseases.



Cleanup (continued)

- If you have any open cuts or sores that will be exposed to floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and applying an antibiotic ointment to discourage infections.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or sick.
- Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and lines.
- Anything that has had contact with floodwater could carry germs. To keep everyone safe, make sure everything is disinfected.
- Wash with soap and water once you are done cleaning.
- If a boil water advisory is in effect, make sure you boil the water for at least one minute.
- If sewage is involved, make sure to wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and goggles during your cleanup.
- When handling heavy/bulky objects, have at least two people work together to move the objects.
- Avoid lifting any materials that weigh more than 50 pounds (per person).
- Rest when you need to.
- Decide which cleanup tasks are most important, and focus on those first.
- In hot weather, try to stay cool by staying in air conditioned buildings, taking breaks in shaded areas or in cool rooms. Drink water and non-alcoholic fluids often and wear light and loose-fitting clothing.
- Do outdoor activities during cooler hours.
- If electrical circuits and electrical equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, then call an electrician to turn it off.
- Never turn power on or off or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.

- Do not connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. If a generator is on line when electrical service is restored, it can become a major fire hazard and it may endanger line workers helping to restore power in you area.

Get the Right Safety Gear for Cleanup

Keep the following items on hand to assist you in your cleanup:

- Hard hats
- Goggles
- N95 masks (or a respirator with a higher protection level)
- Heavy work gloves
- Waterproof boots with a steel toe and insole
- Earplugs or protective headphones
- At least two fire extinguishers

Safety Circular TDCJ Risk Management Department

Marvin Dunbar , Director

Administrative Review and Risk Management Division

Travis Turner, Deputy Director

Administrative Review and Risk Management Division

Leonard Echessa, Deputy Director

Administrative Review and Risk Management Division

The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees.

Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

Send suggestions to:

Jeania Pegoda, Manager IV

Risk Management

P.O. Box 99, Huntsville, Texas 77340

or, Jeania.Pegoda@tdcj.texas.gov

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References: ♦ redcross.org ♦