



## Disaster Facts – Hurricanes and Tropical Storms

A **Tropical Storm** sustains winds of 39 to 73 miles per hour; a storm is assigned a name when it reaches tropical storm strength.

A **Hurricane** sustains winds of 74 miles per hour or more and is accompanied by heavy rain. Hurricanes are designated from categories one through five as they increase in wind strength and the height of expected storm surge. Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and Hurricane Andrew in 1992 were both Category 4 hurricanes.

A **Storm Surge** is a rise in tide caused by a hurricane as it moves over or near the coastline, often with breaking waves on top. A storm surge can cause devastating damage: entire buildings can collapse once the storm surge wipes away the foundation; millions of fish are killed by the crash of the storm surge against the coastline, and many people drown in the strong current produced by the storm surge.

A **Hurricane Watch** is issued when hurricane conditions pose a possible threat to an area within 36 hours.

A **Hurricane Warning** is issued when a hurricane is expected to strike within 24 hours.

The **Hurricane Belt** is described as the area along the Atlantic coast from Virginia south to Key West, Florida, and along the Gulf of Mexico from Key West to and including Texas.

**Tornadoes** often accompany hurricanes.

Hurricanes spiral counterclockwise around a relatively calm center known as the **eye of the storm**. Hurricane-force winds and torrential rains border this calm. Additional winds, rains, etc. will follow the calming down of the storm (eye of the storm). **Remain indoors until experts advise that the storm has passed.**

Hurricane winds do much damage, but huge waves can raise tides 15 feet or more. These waves often come rapidly and produce flooding and flash floods. **Drowning is the greatest cause of hurricane deaths.**

**Vertical evacuation (moving to second or third floor) is not safe.** Storm surges can wipe out the foundation and/or the first floor, destroying the upper floors in the process.

**Board windows up instead of taping them.** Broken windows can allow hurricane winds to enter a building and blow off the roof. Boarding up windows where strong winds are expected is a safer method to protect the roof, the interior, and the overall structure of the property and prevent flying glass.

Officials may advise that all utilities be shut off to homes and other property. **Locate shut off valve(s) in advance and know how to use them safely.** Write down step-by-step instructions and make sure more than one person knows how to use them.

When storm conditions arrive, **secure all outside items** such as lawn furniture, children's toys, etc. so they do not become airborne.

**Important records** such as tax documents, insurance policies, social security cards, birth certificates, passports, bonds, stocks, wills, and medical information **should be placed in a waterproof container and stored in a safe place.**

**If sheltering at home, stay in the room or area most central to the home,** preferably without windows.

**Take pictures of your home and property before a storm hits.** If your property is damaged, take more photos after the storm. Develop 2 sets and give one set to your insurance company. Keep one set and the negatives in a safe location. Do not begin clean up until an insurance agent has inspected the damage.

**When flooding accompanies a hurricane, snakes and rodents can become a hazard.** Stray dogs and cats can cause problems also. Pets can become hostile once they have endured the effects of a serious storm.

**Disruption of garbage and trash pickup can pose a problem.** Food that cannot be used or saved after a storm should be buried rather than left outside to attract animals.

To **avoid accidents** in the home after a storm, clean up a room where small children can stay safely.

**Looting can also be a problem after a storm.** Work with your neighbors and friends and consider taking turns standing watch if looting becomes a problem.

Check with local civil defense or emergency management authorities before using any water after a flood. **Water sources may have been contaminated.**