

June through November is the official time period in which hurricanes are the most likely. The strength of these storms can vary, but hurricanes are one of the most destructive natural disasters. Individuals and organizations on eastern and gulf coasts must be ready for the conditions and situations that these storms can bring.

Know the Facts

In order to prepare for hurricanes, it is necessary to fully understand them. According to the [National Hurricane Center](#), hurricanes are one classification of a cyclone. A cyclone is a rotating system of clouds and storms that can be found over tropical or subtropical waters. There are four classifications:

- Tropical depression;
- Tropical storm;
- Hurricane; and
- Major hurricane.

How these classifications differ is based on their maximum sustained wind speeds. A cyclone becomes a hurricane once the sustained wind speeds reach 74 mph or higher. At a sustained wind speed of 111 mph or higher, it then becomes a major hurricane.

In forecasting and categorizing hurricanes, a term often used is the [Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale](#). The National Hurricane Center categorizes hurricanes as follows:

- Category 1: winds 75 to 95 mph
- Category 2: winds 96 to 110 mph
- Category 3: winds 111 to 130 mph
- Category 4: winds 131 to 155 mph
- Category 5: winds 156 mph or higher

A category 1 hurricane may only bring damage to a roof or power lines and take down some trees. However, a category 5 hurricane can cause complete collapse to structures and are ultimately more devastating.

Creating a Plan

Hurricanes may be unavoidable, but the first step in being prepared is having a plan. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) provide some [key steps](#) to take in preparing for a hurricane.

When creating your own plan, take into consideration these basic steps:

- **Ensure your organization has the appropriate insurance coverage.** Check with your agent and make sure your policy is up-to-date and that you have the necessary coverage for hurricane damage.
- **Research the emergency plan for the surrounding community.** Look at what the evacuation routes are and what the warning signals may be for your community. Use this information to inform your members and create a plan for your organization.
- **Look for potential hazards in your facility.** Be prepared to turn off all electrical power if there is standing water or fallen power lines. Before evacuation, turn off gas and water supplies. Secure structurally unstable building materials.

Taking Action

As an organization, your leaders also should be taking steps to prepare for a hurricane. These steps include:

- **Information Back-Up:** Information, data, inventory and equipment are very important assets to any organization. It is a good idea to have a written inventory with photo documentation of all the contents in your facility. Should the storm cause damage to the building, this information will assist in filing a claim with your insurance company. Along with a written inventory and corresponding photos, any important electronic data should be copied and stored at a secure off-site location.
- **Emergency Contact Information:** Maintain a copy of phone numbers for pastors, staff, leaders or volunteers at a secure off-site location. It also may be a good idea to include your insurance agent and the local authorities for your community.
- **Building and Grounds:** Many precautions should be taken in preparing your property for a hurricane. It is best to cover all windows with hurricane shutters. However, stained-glass windows will need more protection. It is recommended to use a framed cover made of plywood or a manufactured hurricane shutter. The key is to have the proper protection securely fastened down with screws. Doors of the building should be made of solid wood or hollow metal and have heavy-duty hinges. A deadbolt security lock is recommended and the door framing should be securely anchored to the wall structure. Make sure the roof is in good repair and that all openings are sealed. To avoid clogging in gutters and downspouts, be sure to clear them of leaves, twigs and other material. Secure anything outside that could cause damage to the building.
- **Utilities:** Consider shutting off gas and electrical supply, assuming the building will be unoccupied during the storm. This is especially important for the areas that may become flooded.
- **Inside:** Be sure that all valuable objects inside the building are secured and storm-proofed.

Preparing an Emergency Shelter

In the event that your church should be used as an emergency shelter, still take the necessary actions in preparing for the storm. And, it is crucial that your facility is stocked with an adequate amount of supplies for those who may be seeking shelter from the storm. [The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) provides a list for a [basic disaster supplies kit](#). Items that are recommended include:

- **Water** – one gallon per person per day for a minimum of three days
- **Food** – non-perishable food supply to last at least three days
- **Radio** – battery-powered or hand crank
- **Flashlight** – include extra batteries
- **First Aid Kit**
- **Sanitation Products** – moist toiles, garbage bags and plastic ties
- **Toiletry Items**
- **Blankets**
- **Wrench or Pliers** – to turn off utilities
- **Manual Can Opener**
- **Local Maps**
- **Communication Devices** – cell phone with charger, inverter or solar charger

During the Storm

During a hurricane, there are two options as to what you can do. You can wait it out or evacuate.

- **Wait it out** – If evacuation is not advised, do not go out into the storm. To ensure your safety, do not venture outside until the local authorities have informed the community it is safe to do so.
- **Evacuation** – Be sure to have an evacuation route pre-planned with maps available and ready. If you are called upon to participate in ministry, let others know where you will be staying and how they can contact you.

Regardless of where you may be during a hurricane, always remember to stay informed. Use a NOAA weather radio or tune in to a local station, to stay updated on storm developments.

Responding to a Hurricane

Returning to the church after a hurricane requires careful attention, even after local authorities have stated it is safe. When traveling back into the area, be cautious driving through damaged areas. Driving through water is not advised. Things to be vigilant for are downed trees, branches, power lines or debris in roadways.

When inspecting the church property, make sure the outside is safe before entering. Structural damage, power lines, standing water, broken windows or pipes are all things to be cautious of. If you have any reason to believe the building is not safe, do not enter, and have a qualified building inspector inspect the facility. Do not enter if you smell gas, observe any downed power lines, or if floodwaters remain around the building. After you have assessed the property and you believe it is safe, enter the building carefully. While inside, use flashlights rather than candles, and do not restart mechanical or electrical systems until you've consulted with a qualified professional.

Take photos of any building damage and report it to your insurance company. In order to prevent further damage from weather, temporary repairs may be necessary. Keep any receipts from such temporary repairs and report them to your insurance company.

Additional Information

For additional information on how to prepare for hurricanes, visit the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/index.asp
- The National Hurricane Center: www.nhc.noaa.gov
- The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.fema.gov/

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