

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

May 26, 2021

Preparing for the 2021 Hurricane Season

The 2021 Hurricane Season is upon us. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center is predicting a 60% chance of an above-normal [2021 Atlantic hurricane season](#). With 70% confidence, NOAA is projecting:

- 13 to 20 Named Storms (top winds of 39 mph or higher), including:
- 6 to 10 Hurricanes (top winds of 74 mph or higher), of which:
- 3 to 5 could be Major Hurricanes (Category 3, 4, or 5; winds of at least 111 mph)

In 2020, Swiss Re Corporate Solutions tracked the rapid rate at which a storm could change course or grow in scale. As they approached the coast, they went through what is known as *rapid intensification*. Storms would become very strong very quickly. Because this was happening near the coast, that meant there was a much shorter window of time for emergency managers, governments, businesses, and individuals to prepare for the event.

While law enforcement, fire, EMS, public works, and other departments will be called upon and must be prepared to assist their communities, leaders of these organizations must also prepare for the possibility they may be the ones affected by a storm. Leaders are reminded of their obligation to protect their own, so they can protect others. Now is the time to prepare your facility, equipment, personnel, and business infrastructure for the possibility that you will be the one in need. The Safety Director recommends the following actions:

1. Discuss claim reporting procedures with your risk manager. Ensure there is a clear reporting procedure from the person finding the storm damage, to the department's representative, to the Fund's claim representative. Work with risk managers to identify possible insurance gaps and discuss areas of exposure.
2. Develop an Operations Continuity Plan. Identify the department's critical functions and infrastructure. Safeguard vital records.
 - a. Create mutual aid pacts and vendor lists to provide services, or replace infrastructure affected by stormwater or wind.
 - b. If the facility is in a historically vulnerable area, consider relocating just before the storm hits.
 - c. Take pictures of the building and essential equipment.
3. Develop salvage response and mitigation plans. Protect property from further damage when possible by quickly restoring power and fire-protection systems, repairing leaks, and providing temporary supports.
4. Survey the grounds and exterior of the building for loose objects and properly secure them. Trim trees from the building. Secure sheds and other outbuildings.
 - a. Gather mitigation resources such as sandbags, food & water, personal sundry items, plastic sheeting, and duct tape, extra mops, and squeegees.
 - b. Make sure gasoline or diesel generators' fuel tanks are full.
 - c. Make sure utility shut-offs are labeled and locations are known by occupants.
5. Inventory routine, emergency, and backup equipment. Test emergency and backup equipment.
 - a. Perform routine maintenance on chainsaws, pumps, and other restorative equipment. Sharpen blades. Buy extras.
 - b. Verify contact information for employees. Distribute updated contact information to stakeholders.

6. Prepare your personnel – Workers must be trained to properly respond to storm conditions. Encourage them to have Go Bags.
 - a. Remind employees, as the storm nears, they should sleep, eat, and hydrate themselves to prepare for a strenuous period.
7. Inventory routine, emergency, and backup equipment. Test emergency and backup equipment.
 - a. Perform routine maintenance on chainsaws, pumps, and other restorative equipment. Sharpen blades. Buy extras.
 - b. Verify contact information for employees. Distribute updated contact information to stakeholders.
8. Prepare your personnel – Workers must be trained to properly respond to storm conditions. Encourage them to have Go Bags.
 - a. Remind employees, as the storm nears, they should sleep, eat, and hydrate themselves to prepare for a strenuous period.
9. Prepare workers' families – Essential personnel cannot be available or effective if their families are not taken care of. Leaders must work with Administration, Human Resources, banks, Red Cross, etc. to make sure families are safely evacuated and cared for ahead of the approaching storm. Consider distributing the [Red Cross's Family Disaster Plan](#) form to assist with their planning.

There are several resources available to help planners.

- OSHA provides a [Hazard Exposure and Risk Assessment Matrix](#) with information on many of the most common and significant additional hazards that response and recovery workers might encounter when working in an area recently devastated by a hurricane. The Matrix is designed to help employers make decisions during their risk assessment that will protect their workers working in hurricane-impacted areas.
- [Ready.gov](#) has many excellent hurricane planning tools for businesses and families.
- N.J. Office of Emergency Management produced a [New Jersey Hurricane Survival Guide](#) for local information.

In addition to normally anticipated hazards when planning for, and responding to hurricanes, the 2021 hurricane season will be further complicated with the lingering presence of COVID-19 in our New Jersey communities.

In May 2021, FEMA updated their [COVID-19 Pandemic All-Hazards Incident Response and Recovery Operational Guidance](#) document. As the nation continues to recover from COVID-19 while posturing for the coming hurricane season, emergency managers must continue to anticipate challenges to disaster operations posed by COVID-19.