Hurricane Safety – Evacuation Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Hurricanes are powerful and destructive storms that can bring high winds, heavy rainfall, flooding, and storm surges. These hazards pose significant threats to life and property. When a hurricane beckons, evacuation orders are issued to move people away from dangerous areas. Understanding evacuation orders, planning, and acting quickly is crucial for staying safe during a hurricane. Failing to evacuate when ordered puts you, your loved ones, and first responders at unnecessary risk.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Hurricanes present a multitude of dangers, making evacuation essential in certain situations. Staying in an evacuation zone during a hurricane can expose you to:

- **Storm Surges:** This is the most dangerous hurricane hazard. It's a rise in sea level caused by the storm's winds pushing water onshore. Storm surges can inundate coastal areas, causing widespread flooding and structural damage.
- **High Winds:** Hurricane-force winds can damage buildings, trees, and power lines, creating flying debris and power outages.
- **Flooding:** Heavy rainfall can lead to inland flooding, even far from the coast. This flooding can make roads impassable and damage property.
- **Flying Debris:** High winds can turn unsecured objects into dangerous projectiles, posing a serious threat to anyone who remains in the storm's path.
- **Isolation:** Flooding and road closures can isolate people who choose not to evacuate, making it difficult for emergency services to reach them.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Evacuating safely requires planning and preparation. It’s not just about leaving when told; it’s about having a solid plan in place well before a storm occurs. This preparation can significantly improve your safety and reduce stress during a chaotic situation.

Before Hurricane Season:

Preparing for hurricane season is crucial for your safety. It’s not enough to wait until a storm is imminent; planning ahead is essential. The first step is to determine if you live in a designated evacuation zone. This information is usually available from your local emergency management agency. Once you know your zone, develop a comprehensive evacuation plan. This plan should include your evacuation route, identifying several alternate routes in case your primary route becomes blocked due to flooding or debris. You should also choose a safe destination, such as a friend or family member’s home located outside the evacuation zone, or identify designated shelters in your area.

Another vital part of pre-season preparation is assembling a disaster supply kit. This kit should contain enough essential supplies, including food, water, medications, and other necessities, to last for several days. Key items to include are a flashlight with extra batteries, a well-stocked first-aid kit, a battery-powered or hand-crank weather radio to stay updated on conditions, and copies of important documents in a waterproof container. Finally, stay informed throughout the hurricane season by actively monitoring weather forecasts and official alerts.

When an Evacuation Order is Issued:

Evacuate Immediately: This is the most critical step. Do not delay. As soon as an evacuation order is issued by local authorities, leave. Time is of the essence, and waiting can put you and others in serious danger.

Follow Designated Evacuation Routes: Use the evacuation routes recommended by local authorities. These routes are carefully

planned to manage traffic flow and avoid areas prone to flooding or other hazards. Do not attempt to take shortcuts, as these may be blocked or more dangerous.

Secure Your Home (If Time Permits): If you have time before evacuating, take steps to protect your property. This might include boarding up windows with plywood, bringing loose outdoor objects (like furniture, grills, and trash cans) inside, and turning off utilities like gas and electricity at the main switches. However, do not delay evacuating to focus on securing your home. Your life is more important.

Bring Your Disaster Supply Kit: Take your pre-assembled disaster supply kit with you. This kit should contain everything you need to survive for several days, including food, water, medications, first-aid supplies, a flashlight, a weather radio, and important documents.

Inform Others of Your Plans: Let family members, friends, and neighbors know where you are going and when you plan to leave. This helps people stay informed and can be crucial if communication becomes difficult later.

Do Not Return Until It Is Safe: Do not return to your home until local authorities have officially declared it safe to do so. Returning too early can put you in danger from remaining hazards like downed power lines, flooding, or structural damage.

In Case of an Emergency During Evacuation:

- **Stay Calm:** If you encounter traffic jams or other delays, stay calm and follow the instructions of emergency personnel.
- **Seek Higher Ground:** If flooding occurs during your evacuation, seek higher ground immediately.
- **Do Not Drive Through Floodwaters:** Never drive through floodwaters. The water may be deeper than it appears, and your vehicle could stall or be swept away.

FINAL WORD

Remember, hurricanes are powerful forces of nature, but we can minimize the danger by being proactive. By planning, assembling a disaster kit, and evacuating immediately when ordered, we can significantly increase our chances of staying safe. Don’t wait until the last minute; preparation is key.