

## **It's That Time Again... Another Hurricane Season Is Upon Us**

After the destruction and (in some cases) ongoing rebuilding and clean-up of last year's Hurricane Ike, it seems impossible that another hurricane season is upon us. But as of June 1, it is here again. Although the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) is predicting a "near-normal" Atlantic hurricane season, we are all well aware that it takes just one strong storm to wreak havoc, especially on our already compromised Gulf Coast region. As a result, it is important that we all prepare ahead-of-time for the possibility of a tropical storm or hurricane striking our area.

At PFD, we hope that the 2009 season will prove to be uneventful, but if we aren't so lucky, please know that we will once again work closely with local fire and EMS, and with our Water Districts and Homeowner's Associations to handle any and all situations that come our way. Our preparation prior to Hurricane Ike definitely paid off...our radio system worked flawlessly, the Cypress Creek EMS communications center was well-staffed and had plenty of ambulances on the streets, and all roads in our fire district were clear of downed trees less than twelve hours after Ike's strike thanks to the hard work of our dedicated volunteers and paid staff.

If another storm heads our way this season, we are as ready as necessary, but please be aware that in the emergency hours before and after a hurricane, the ultimate safety of you and your family rests predominately in your hands. Why? In times of county-wide emergencies, we must respond first to those most vulnerable: only the elderly, the poor and the disabled should count on the government to help them escape a hurricane or endure its immediate aftermath. Emergency services cannot respond if wind speeds are over 45 mph – and once we are cleared to head out, we must first take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.

### **How do I Prepare for a Hurricane?**

Hurricane season – which runs from June 1 to November 30 – generally ramps up in August and peaks in early September into October, but we must be prepared for a storm at any time. To help ensure your family and friends are as safe as possible this year, PFD has compiled some helpful hints and sectioned them into four categories: 1) Before a Hurricane Forms, 2) Before the Storm Hits, 3) During the Storm, and 4) After the Storm. Please familiarize yourself with these tips and share them with your family members, friends and co-workers.

#### **Before a Hurricane Forms**

- Know the hurricane risks in this area and your community safety plan, including the location of official area shelters.
- Visit the Harris County Homeland Security & Emergency Management website ([www.hcoem.org](http://www.hcoem.org)) to find comprehensive information on developing a family hurricane action plan.

- Create a family plan and have a meeting to make sure that all understand it. The plan should include knowing how to turn off the main breaker in the circuit breaker panel and how to shut off the natural gas meter. This will prevent fire and damage to sensitive electronic equipment, refrigerators, freezers and air conditioners.
- Make sure all family members with special needs and may require assistance during an evacuation are registered with the State of Texas “Special Transportation Registry”. Registration allows specialists to help local emergency management officials develop transportation strategies for those who are bedridden, require oxygen, medications that need refrigeration, wheelchair assistance, etc. To register, simply call the United Way of Greater Houston’s 2-1-1 call center by dialing 2-1-1.
- Review the condition of emergency equipment, such as flashlights, radios, generators, etc., and make sure your fire extinguishers are placed in proper locations around your home. Check to see that all smoke alarms are in working order.
- Ensure you have enough non-perishable food and water on hand.
- Trim trees and shrubbery.
- Buy plywood or shutters to protect doors and windows.
- Clear clogged rain gutters and downspouts.

#### **Before the Storm Hits**

- Check media outlets for official news of the storm’s progress.
- Fuel and service family vehicles.
- Have extra cash on hand.
- Prepare to cover all windows and doors with shutters or other shielding materials.
- Bring inside lightweight objects such as grills, lawn furniture, and garden tools.

#### **During the Storm**

##### ***In a Warning Area:***

- Check media outlets for official news of the storm’s progress.
- Complete preparation activities such as putting up shutters and storing loose objects.
- Follow instructions issued by local officials. If an evacuation is mandatory, **leave immediately if, and only if, told to do so.** Improvements made due to the infamous gridlock of the Rita evacuation – such as contra flow lanes outside of Harris County and monitoring by planes and helicopters to reduce choke points – are certain to make the trip to safer ground much less of a hassle. Check [www.hcoem.org](http://www.hcoem.org) for the new “Evacuation by Zip Code Map” and “Evacuation Contraflow Routes”.
- Notify neighbors and family members of your plan to evacuate.
- Take pets with you. *Note:* Shelters may not accept pets.

##### ***If Staying Home:***

- Stay at home if you have not been ordered to leave.

- Stay inside a well-constructed building.
- Turn refrigerator to its coldest setting and keep closed.
- Turn off utilities if told to do so by authorities.
- Turn off propane tanks.
- Unplug small appliances.
- Fill a bathtub, sink, or large containers with water for sanitary purposes.

***In Case of Strong Winds:***

- Stay away from windows and doors even if they are covered.
- Close all interior doors, and brace external doors.
- Stay in an interior first-floor room, such as a bathroom or closet.
- Lie on the floor under a table or another sturdy object.
- Always remember, “hide from the wind, run from the water”.

**After the Storm**

- Check media outlets for official news of the storm’s passing and current road conditions. Wait until an area is declared safe before entering.
- Do not attempt to drive across flowing water.
- Stay away from moving water, and do not allow children to play in flooded areas.
- Call in emergency responders to attempt rescues. Many people have been killed or injured trying to rescue others from flooded areas.
- Stay away from standing water. It may be electrically charged, and certainly could have toxic materials.
- Have professionals check gas, water, and electrical lines for damage.
- Use tap water for drinking and cooking only after local officials declare it safe to do so.
- If power is out and you are utilizing a generator, remember that they **MUST** be kept outdoors...carbon monoxide will kill.