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Hurricanes: Preparedness and Evacuation

About Hurricanes

Hurricanes are severe tropical storms, massive storm systems, that form over the open water in the southern Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

Each year, many coastal communities experience threats from hurricanes including heavy rains, strong winds, rip currents, floods, and coastal storm surges from tropical storms and hurricanes. A hurricane may spawn tornadoes. Torrential rains cause further damage by causing floods and landslides, which not only threaten coastal communities but may impact communities many miles inland.

The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, with the peak occurring between mid-August and late October.

Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale

1. 74-95 MPH | Some Damage
2. 96-110 MPH | Extensive Damage
3. 111-129 MPH | Devastating
4. 130-156 MPH | Catastrophic
5. 157+ MPH | Catastrophic

Advisory vs. Watch vs. Warning

Tropical Storm/Hurricane Advisory

Issued when conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences that may be hazardous. If caution is used, these situations should not be life-threatening.

Tropical Storm/Hurricane Watch

Issued when a tropical storm or hurricane is possible within 48 hours. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, local radio, TV, or other news sources for more info. Monitor alerts, check your emergency supplies, and gather any items you may need if you lose power.

Tropical Storm/Hurricane Warning

Issued when a tropical storm or hurricane is expected within 36 hours. During a Warning, complete your storm preparations and immediately leave the threatened area if directed to do so by local or state officials or shelter in place if no evacuation has been ordered.

Hazard Mitigation

Planning and preparing before a hurricane strikes can help you manage the impact of high winds and floodwaters. Take the steps outlined below to keep you and your family safe while protecting your home and property. If you are a renter, talk with your landlord or property manager about additional steps you can take.

► Download the [Hurricane Evacuation Guide](#)

Prepare Your Home

- Bring loose, lightweight objects such as patio furniture, garbage cans, bicycles, and children's toys inside.
- Board up windows and close all storm shutters. Secure and reinforce the roof, doors, and garage door.
- Anchor objects that would be unsafe to bring inside (e.g., gas grills and propane tanks).
- Trim or remove damaged trees and limbs close enough to fall on structures.
- Secure loose rain gutters and downspouts and clear any clogged areas or debris to prevent water damage to your property.
- Purchase a portable generator or install a whole-house generator for use during power outages.
- Keep alternative power sources, such as a portable generator, outside, at least 20 feet away from the house, and protected from moisture.
- Document the condition of your home prior to the storm for insurance purposes: photos, video.

Prepare Your Business

- Document employee responsibilities and roles before a hurricane strikes and review with each employee.
- Conduct a drill to ensure staff members comprehend their roles and test your emergency plans. Follow up with an after-action report and lessons-learned session.
- Contact your vendors to understand their preparedness plans and how a disaster will impact your supply chain.
- Move computers and other Information Technology (IT) systems away from large windows and doors.
- Relocate valuables and IT systems to the upper level of your facility or to a more secure location if needed.
- Ensure vital records are protected: analyze your off-site backup record storage, and place valuable documentation and digital storage media in a waterproof, fireproof box.
- Cover all doors and windows.
- Purchase a flood insurance policy to protect your financial investment.

Flood Insurance

Just one inch of water in a home or office can cost thousands in cleanup costs, including replacing drywall, baseboards, floor coverings, and furniture. Buying flood insurance is the best way to protect your home, your business, and your family's financial security from the costs associated with flood damage.

Talk to your insurance agent about purchasing flood insurance and remember:

- For general inquiries about the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), contact the FEMA Mapping and Insurance eXchange (FMIX) center at 877-336-2627 or visit www.floodsmart.gov.
- There is a 30-day waiting period before a flood insurance policy takes effect. Don't wait!
- Homeowner and rental insurance do not cover flood losses, so you will need to purchase a separate flood insurance policy.
- Annual premiums for a policy increase according to the level of flood risk and the amount of coverage needed.

- Whether you rent or own, it's a good idea to purchase flood insurance. The NFIP offers both building and contents coverage if you own a home or business. If you are a renter, contents-only coverage is also available.
- As of 2021, people outside of high-risk areas file more than 25 percent of NFIP claims and receive one-third of disaster assistance for flooding.
- Use the Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS) at www.dcr.virginia.gov/vfris to find out your property's flood risk.

► For more information about flood safety and additional resources, visit www.vaemergency.gov/threats/floods.

Emergency Supplies

It can take several days or weeks for government services and assistance to reach you and your family depending on the severity of the storm and your geographic location. An emergency kit is vital to sustaining your family after a disaster.

Use our [checklist](#) to build your emergency supply kit by adding a few items each week or month. Many emergency preparedness products are eligible for Virginia's tax-free weekend held annually in August. Regularly replace items that go bad such as water, food, medication, and batteries, and remember to keep in mind your family's unique needs as you build your kit.

To view our emergency supply kit checklist, [visit here](#).

Plan for Your Pets

Not all shelters and hotels accept pets. Plan ahead to stay with family, friends, or at other pet-friendly locations in case you need to evacuate your home.

Pet-Friendly Checklist

- ID tags on collars and microchip pets
- Have sufficient food, water, and medicine for at least 3 days
- Pet medication and medication schedule for caregiver, shelter, or boarding staff
- Description and current photos of your pets, including a photo of you and your pet together
- Immunization and medical records
- Serving bowls and feeding schedule

- Collar, leash, and carrier to transport pets safely
- Pet toys and bedding

Note that shelters must make exceptions to “no pets” or “no animals” policies to allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals. Service animals are not pets and are therefore not subject to restrictions applied to pets or other animals.

Emergency Communications

Your emergency communication plan should include extra cellular phone charging devices as well as additional communication tools: AM/FM radio, smartphone alerts and apps, and a NOAA Weather Radio with additional batteries are recommended.

Make sure your household members with phone and email accounts are signed up for alerts and warnings from their school, workplace, and local government agencies including police, fire, ambulance services, public health department, public works, public utilities, school system, and your local office of emergency management. Following these agencies on social media will provide you with an additional avenue to access convenient and critical information. It’s also a good idea to identify alternate caregiver options in the event of an emergency.

Know Your Zone

Know Your Zone is an awareness initiative that applies to roughly 1.25 million residents in 23 localities along Coastal Virginia, the region of the state most vulnerable to hurricanes and other tropical storms. Tiered evacuation zones were developed in close coordination with local emergency managers throughout Hampton Roads, the Northern Neck, the Middle Peninsula, and the Eastern Shore based on the most up-to-date engineering data for the region.

Zones are designated A through D. They provide residents with clarity on whether they should evacuate in an emergency or shelter at home, based on their physical street address and the nature of the emergency event. It is important to remember that during a Zone evacuation, you only need to evacuate to a higher non-evacuated zone. (i.e. if Zone A is the only Zone evacuated then residents would only need to go as far as Zone B). When a serious storm is expected to threaten or impact Virginia’s coastal regions, state and local emergency agencies will work with local news media outlets, as well as social media channels, that will then broadcast and publish

evacuation directives to the public.

► Visit www.KnowYourZoneVA.org to find your evacuation zone.

Return Home Safely

Each year, a significant number of people are injured or killed in the aftermath of a hurricane. As you return home and begin the recovery phase, keep these safety tips in mind:

- Wait to return to your property until local officials have declared that the area is safe.
- Do not wade in floodwaters, which can contain dangerous debris including broken glass, metal, dead animals, sewage, gasoline, oil, and downed power lines.
- Do not enter a building until it has been inspected for damage to the electrical system, gas lines, septic systems, and water lines or wells.
- Avoid drinking tap water until you know it is safe. If uncertain, boil or purify it first.
- Watch for fallen objects and downed electrical wires; Stay at least 30 feet away from downed lines – consider them energized and dangerous; report downed power lines to your local utility provider.
- If you lost power, report outages directly to Dominion Energy, your local electrical provider or cooperative.
 - Dominion Energy | Report outages and check your status at dominionenergy.com/outages. Report downed lines and other safety hazards at 866-366-4357.
- Hurricanes or the threat of hurricanes can add more stress. Try to be available for loved ones who may need someone to talk to about their feelings.
- For immediate crisis counseling following a disaster, call the Disaster Distress Helpline toll-free at 1-800-985-5990. To find a health care provider or treatment for substance use disorder and mental health, contact SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or TTY: 1-800-487-4889 for speech or hearing impaired. Call or text 9-8-8 if you or someone you know is in crisis or suicidal. All services are multilingual.

Recovery Resources

Local

Contact your city or county's department of social services, human services, community services board, public health, housing, and local emergency management office to access additional resources and assistance after a hurricane or disaster.

Nonprofits and charities stand ready to mobilize and assist your community after a storm, including local food banks. Learning about the organizations that are active in your community before a storm, and supporting these organizations throughout the year, makes these organizations sustainable and successful in their efforts to support your community after a hurricane or other disaster.

► Download the [Hurricane Preparedness - Inland Impacts Guide](#)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Individuals and Households Program (IHP)

After a Presidential disaster declaration is made, FEMA's Individuals and Households Program may provide financial help or direct services to those who have necessary expenses and serious needs if they are unable to meet these needs through other means. Contact the FEMA Individuals and Households Program at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY: 1-800-462-7585 for speech or hearing impaired.

Public Assistance: Local, State, Tribal, and Private Nonprofit

FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) grant program may provide federal assistance to government organizations and certain private nonprofit (PNP) organizations following a Presidential disaster declaration.

PA provides grants to state, tribal, territorial, local governments and certain types of PNP organizations so that communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies.

Small Business Administration (SBA)

The SBA may loan money to homeowners, renters, and business owners. Homeowners may borrow up to \$200,000 for disaster-related home repairs. Homeowners and renters may borrow up to \$40,000 to replace disaster-damaged

personal property including vehicles. The SBA may not duplicate benefits from your insurance or FEMA. You may receive an SBA referral when you apply with FEMA. Contact the SBA at 800-659-2955 from 8 a.m. – 9 p.m., Mon. – Fri., or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov.

To find out how you can help after a natural disaster, visit the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster website at www.nvoad.org.

Who to Call

2-1-1 | 24/7, statewide trained professionals who listen to your situation and offer sources of help using one of the largest databases of health and human services in Virginia. Visit www.211virginia.org for more information.

3-1-1 | In select localities throughout the Commonwealth, 3-1-1 connects callers to their local government, non-emergency, and citizen services including information, services, key contacts, and programs.

5-1-1 | “Know Before You Go,” offers real-time traffic information throughout the Commonwealth. Anytime you need it, anywhere you are. For more information, visit www.511virginia.org.

7-1-1 | A 24/7 free public service, Virginia Relay enables people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, sign language users, Spanish-speaking users, or those who have difficulty speaking to communicate with standard telephone users. The conversation is relayed between the two by a specially trained Virginia Relay Communication Assistant (CA).

8-1-1 | “Call Before You Dig – It’s the Law,” is a free Virginia communications center for excavators, contractors, property owners, and those planning any kind of excavation or digging. When recovering from a disaster, an individual or business may plan to excavate. Before any digging, call 8-1-1, where participating utilities will locate and mark their underground facilities and lines in advance to prevent a possible injury, damage, or monetary fine.

9-1-1 | For emergencies only, including fire, medical, reporting accidents, crimes in progress, and suspicious individuals or events. 9-1-1 is not to be used for traffic or weather updates and information requests. Please keep the lines clear for those seeking emergency support.

Additional Resources

FEMA's Ready campaign: www.ready.gov/hurricanes

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes

National Weather Service: www.noaa.gov/hurricane-prep

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