

Hurricane Preparedness and Response

Each year from June through November, Texas faces the threat of hurricanes. While coastal communities are most at risk, inland areas of the state also are vulnerable. To survive a hurricane and its aftermath, Texans should know the dangers they face and get prepared.

Learn about the dangers of hurricanes

Hurricanes are among nature's fiercest storms. The four greatest dangers hurricanes pose are extreme wind speeds, storm surge, torrential rains and tornadoes.

- **Hurricane-force winds** are 74 miles per hour and greater. Even the weakest storms can uproot trees, down power lines and damage buildings. Category 5 storms can cause catastrophic wind damage to residential and commercial buildings.
- When hurricanes come ashore, they push a dome of sea water over the land. This is called **storm surge**. Storm surges may range from a few feet high to more than 18 feet above normal sea level. A storm surge can batter buildings off of their foundations and present an extreme drowning danger. It is never safe to "ride out" a hurricane in a surge zone. Do you live in a surge zone? To find out, contact your city or county Office of Emergency Management.
- Hurricanes bring with them **torrential rainfalls** that often cause severe flooding. Generally storms that move slowly produce heavier rainfall. Inland areas also are at risk from flooding and flash flooding caused by hurricanes.
- Another serious danger from hurricanes is tornadoes. Some hurricanes have spawned dozens of tornadoes that have caused as much damage as the storm itself. Hurricane Beulah, which struck Texas in 1967, holds the record for most tornadoes spawned by a hurricane with 115 reported. The danger of tornadoes can reach hundreds of miles inland.

How to get prepared for hurricanes

Residents of Texas' Gulf Coast should get prepared early. If you already have a plan, you may need to update it. If you don't have a plan, this is what you should do:

- **Make an evacuation plan**
Plan your evacuation route ahead of time. Fill up your car's gas tank before leaving and pack plenty of snacks and water for the long trip. If you live in an evacuation zone and need transportation assistance, dial 2-1-1 to register for a ride. It's important to register in advance and to renew your registration each year.
- **Make a plan for where you will stay.**
Do you have family or friends who live far enough inland? Can you afford to stay at a hotel? Is a public shelter your best option? Tune into TV or radio stations for information about public shelter locations.

- Put together a **disaster supplies kit** with essential items such as water, food, medications and copies of important documents.
- Be sure to plan for family members who are elderly, young or have special health care needs. And don't forget to plan for your pets.
- Secure property before evacuating
- Early in the season, be sure your insurance policy is up to date, and keep a copy of it in your document bag.
- Remove tree limbs that could fall on your home.
- If you live in a mobile home, secure it with tie-downs.
- Board up windows and doors.
- Move patio furniture, barbecue grills, potted plants and other loose objects indoors.
- Follow the advice of local officials on whether to turn off gas and electricity before leaving.

Avoiding injuries when returning home

Dangers such as high water, downed electrical power lines and broken gas mains are major safety threats after hurricanes. Wait for public officials to give the all-clear before returning home. Once home, follow these precautions:

- Use extreme caution when entering damaged homes or structures.
- Beware of unstable trees and limbs. Falling tree limbs are a major cause of injury and death following hurricanes.
- Downed power lines are a serious electrocution hazard. Never touch downed power lines or any objects that are in contact with them, including water. Do not enter flooded homes if the electricity may still be on. Report electrical hazards to authorities.
- If you smell gas, call the gas company. Do not smoke, light candles or use matches near gas leaks.
- Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long pants, long sleeves and gloves when cleaning up.
- Help avoid injuries when using chain saws and power tools by learning how to operate them properly, and always follow recommended safety procedures. Whenever possible, use battery- powered flashlights and lanterns instead of candles.

Safeguarding your health

Conditions following hurricanes are uncomfortable and pose numerous health risks. Keep in mind that power outages may last for several days or weeks. Take the following precautions to avoid illness:

- Discard food from your refrigerator if it has reached room temperature. Foods that are still partially frozen or "refrigerator cold" are safe to eat. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Don't drink tap water until authorities say it is safe. Instead, drink bottled water or boil water for at least one minute before drinking. You also can disinfect water with chlorine or iodine (follow package directions) or with ordinary household bleach -- one-eighth teaspoon (about eight drops) per gallon of water. Sterilize water containers and drinking cups with a solution of household bleach.
- Poisoning from carbon monoxide is an avoidable hazard during power outages. Never use generators, camp stoves or charcoal grills inside your home, garage or near open windows, doors or vents. Carbon monoxide is a colorless and odorless gas that can build up and cause sudden illness and death. If you feel dizzy, light-headed or nauseous, seek immediate medical attention.
- Weather conditions following hurricanes are usually very hot and humid. You may not have air conditioning for a long period of time. Avoid heat-related illnesses by drinking plenty of fluids and taking care to not overexert yourself when cleaning up and repairing damage.
- When cleaning up debris, look out for broken glass and exposed nails, a leading cause of tetanus. If you are punctured by a nail or receive a deep wound, get a tetanus shot.
- After a hurricane, it's normal to experience emotional distress. Allow yourself and family members time to grieve. For more information about coping with disaster-related stress, visit DSHS's Response and Recovery web page.