



HURRICANE PLANNING

Warning, Plan Now or Pay Later

(References: US Department of Labor, FEMA, NCLocal.org)

As populations in coastal cities soar and sea levels continue to rise, emergency managers and planners in coastal communities, and even in nearby inland communities, must prepare for the impact of tropical storms and hurricanes. These severe weather events can cause major disruptions for communities and government entities. By asking questions and acting now, local officials can help mitigate the damage caused by these dangerous storms and save lives.

Establishing a broad-based **Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)** that meets regularly to review emergency plans and improve response capabilities is required by both state and federal law for every municipality. The LEPC must meet at least once per year to review the municipal emergency plan. The LEPC should include representatives of all municipal agencies involved in emergency response and recovery, as well as managers from any high risk or large industries in the community. By statute, the group is chaired by the emergency management coordinator. In addition to the leaders of the emergency services, the LEPC should include the following personnel:

Mayor and/or administrator, Construction officials, Other elected officials, Finance officer, DPW Health officer, Engineer, Media representative, School representative, Risk manager (optional) Public Relations Officer (Optional) Operators of facilities subject to SARA Title III.

In addition to reviewing the municipal emergency operations plan, the LEPC should conduct regular evaluations of community vulnerabilities and review the emergency plans of any high-risk facilities, including any schools and healthcare institutions. The LEPC should meet at least four times per year. Elected officials that are not on the LEPC should attend at least one meeting a year to obtain a first-hand exposure to emergency management challenges and resources. Assuring the active participation of school representatives is a particularly important challenge. School officials are outside the normal organizational structure of the municipality and are thus at risk of being isolated from the integrative functions of local government. However, schools are custodians of a critical population (children) and resource (school facilities that are commonly designated as shelters) and must be intimately involved in the emergency planning process.

Questions to answer before the storm (could be discussed at LEPC meetings)

- Have potential areas vulnerable to loss been identified, and measures taken to reduce the impact of the storm on areas and items?
- Have internal emergency procedures been reviewed and exercised? Do employees and managers know their individual roles in an emergency?
- Do employees and the public know evacuation routes out of facilities and out of the area?
- Are there pre-storm procedures in place to secure buildings from high wind and flood damage?
- Are plans in place for communicating with employees and other key organizations before, during and after the storm?
- Do all municipal employees have possession of a municipal identification card or other form of photo

identification?

- Has a list of critical municipal employees been provided to the Emergency Management Director and made available to the Municipal Emergency Operations Center?
- Are there established procedures to back up and/or recover digital data that could be lost during a storm?
- Are backups in such a format to allow for easy transport, and have designated employees been made responsible for the security of the backup files?
- Are there procedures in place to resume critical operations and business functions at a remote location equipped with enough workstations, access to telephone, computer systems, etc.?
- Are extra batteries charged, or have chargers been moved to buildings equipped with emergency generator power?
- Has essential technical expertise been identified to assist in securing data systems and media prior to storm landfall?
- Are vital key records and documents secured in place or transported to a safe place for later access? If left on site, are all papers on pallets elevated off the floor, to avoid flood damage?
- Have fleet vehicles, including public safety vehicles, been dispersed geographically to minimize damage and ensure survivability of the fleet?
- Has one employee been designated as being responsible for collecting damage information on facilities and vehicles, and communicating with the municipality’s risk manager, claim professional or TPA?
- Are all equipment inventories updated, and have they been made available off-site to expedite replacement?
- Are employees allowed extra time to secure their own homes and personal effects?
- In the event of an evacuation, is a list maintained of any employee(s) that remain(s) behind, such as law enforcement or other public safety officers?
- Has the power and gas been turned off at each facility prior to evacuation? Has a predetermined signal been established that a facility is secure and unoccupied?
- Have emergency generators been checked and prepared for operation?
- Have gutters, downspouts, catch basins, and drainage areas been cleared of debris?

What to Expect

Category	Sustained Winds	Types of Damage Due to Hurricane Winds
1	74-95 mph	Very dangerous winds will produce some damage: Well-constructed frame homes could have damage to roof, shingles, vinyl siding and gutters. Large branches of trees will snap, and shallowly rooted trees may be toppled. Extensive damage to power lines and poles likely will result in power outages that could last a few to several days.
2	96-110 mph	Extremely dangerous winds will cause extensive damage: Well-constructed frame homes could sustain major roof and siding damage. Many shallowly rooted trees will be snapped or uprooted and block numerous roads. Near-total power loss is expected with outages that could last from several days to weeks.
3	111-129 mph	Devastating damage will occur: Well-built framed homes may incur major damage or removal of roof decking and gable ends. Many trees will be snapped or uprooted, blocking numerous roads. Electricity and water will be unavailable for several days to weeks after the storm passes.
4	130-156 mph	Catastrophic damage will occur: Well-built framed homes can sustain severe damage with loss of most of the roof structure and/or some exterior walls. Most trees will be snapped or uprooted, and power poles downed. Fallen trees and power poles will isolate residential areas. Power outages will last weeks to possibly months. Most of the area will be uninhabitable for weeks or months.
5	157 mph or higher	Catastrophic damage will occur: A high percentage of framed homes will be destroyed, with total roof failure and wall collapse. Fallen trees and power poles will isolate residential areas. Power outages will last for weeks to possibly months. Most of the area will be uninhabitable for weeks or months.

Questions to answer during the storm

- Have employees been directed to stay indoors, away from windows, and if possible, to move to the downwind side of the building?
- Has any building designated for sheltering of municipal employees been marked to easily locate occupants in the event of a collapse?
- Are employees that remain behind provided with means to maintain radio contact with law enforcement, fire/rescue, or the Municipal Emergency Operations Center?
- Has a method been established whereby the Emergency Operations Center communicates that the storm has passed, and it is safe to leave shelter?

Questions to answer after the storm

- Have staff and all employees involved in the recovery effort been warned to avoid downed power lines, and to remain off roofs and other structures until a damage assessment can be made?
- Has a central point of contact and assembly location and/or incident command center been determined should immediate access to damaged buildings is impossible?
- Is there a damage assessment protocol that can communicate information about the amount of damage to buildings, and safety and environmental considerations, as well as initiate the claims procedure?
- Does this protocol or plan provide for securing inaccessible and damaged sites?
- Have emergency accounting and reporting procedures been established to accurately measure and track the extent of property and financial losses?
- Has staff been informed not to execute any contract or to allow recovery services to be performed without first contacting the municipality's risk manager, claim adjuster or third-party administrator?
- Is there a plan in place to allow effective communication with employees, customers, key vendors, the media, public officials, and the public?
- Is there an established process to identify employee locations and share contact information?
- Is there a plan for aiding employees and their families? Can transportation be provided to accelerate a return to work?

Time to Complete an After Action Report(AAR)

After an incident like a Hurricane/ Tropical Storm an AAR should be completed. The purpose of an After-Action Report (AAR) is to analyze the management or response to an incident, exercise or event by identifying strengths to be maintained and built upon, as well as identifying potential areas of improvement. An ARR provides analysis for lessons learned, best practices and recommendations for future planning, training, and exercise development. As improvement actions are identified and addressed, it is important that any relevant plans, policies and procedures are updated accordingly.

Conclusion

Although no one can predict when, where and with what intensity a weather-related incident will strike, organizations can protect and preserve their people, facilities, and operations best by being prepared for the worst. You may not be able to control the weather, but you can control the impact it has on your organization and the services you provide to citizens.



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