

Hurricane Preparedness

Tips for Churches



Have you ever considered the catastrophic effects a hurricane may have on your Church?

DEVELOP A WRITTEN PLAN

Developing a written preparedness plan and training employees to implement it is critical. The following guidelines are provided to assist you in the development of your plan.

When you develop your written plan, make sure to address the following major areas:

1. Make plans for the protection of buildings and equipment.
2. Develop a staffing policy that identifies essential employees and which of them, if any, must remain at the facility during the hurricane. The policy should identify when employees will be released from work as well as when they are expected to return.
3. Develop procedures and policies for all phases of hurricane operations:
 - Pre-Season Preparedness
 - Hurricane Watch
 - Hurricane Warning
 - After the Hurricane
4. Identify and protect vital records such as accounts receivable, customer records, tax records, and other personnel and administrative documents.
5. Review insurance policies to ensure that there is adequate coverage. Questions to ask include:
 - Is the facility in a high hazard, evacuation area?
 - Does the insurance package include wind/storm coverage?
 - Is the facility located in a flood prone area and is the flood insurance adequate?
 - Does insurance cover damage to contents, including vital records and office equipment?

- Does the package include liability coverage for injury to employees as well as potential lawsuits from customers?

Be Prepared

1. Compile an Emergency Contact List with 24-hour telephone contact numbers of essential employees and volunteers.
2. Identify vital records and make back-up copies. Identify a safe storage level area within the facility where records can be relocated, if necessary. This area should be above ground level and away from windows and exterior walls, which may leak. In a one-story facility, file cabinets and boxes may be placed on pallets up off the floor. Consider moving vital records off-site, particularly if the business is in a storm-surge vulnerable area.
3. Determine responsibility for maintaining the facility. Ensure that the following items are addressed:
 - Patch roofs and windows.
 - Check security and flood lighting.
 - Identify lightweight, loose items in outside storage areas that may be blown around in the wind.
 - Identify emergency power requirements and determine if generator is available. If facility must be operational during a hurricane and a generator is not available, rent or purchase a generator. Test generator monthly during the hurricane season.
 - Determine if computer support will be available for primary/ critical computer users who need to remain operational during a hurricane.
 - Verify that communications equipment is operational.
4. Determine the type and amount of hurricane emergency supplies necessary. All hurricane emergency supplies should be clearly marked and stored in a secure area that is accessible in an emergency. Recommended supplies include:
 - A battery-operated radio or TV (test reception in building).
 - One flashlight per person working during the hurricane.
 - Extra batteries for both radio and flashlights.
 - First-Aid kit.
 - Emergency tool kit, if necessary.
 - Food and water supplies for staff assigned to the facility during the hurricane. Be sure to include needed utensils.
5. Provide employees with hurricane preparedness information.

HURRICANE WATCH

1. Secure all doors, windows, and other openings against wind and water.
2. Tie down or bring indoors any objects which may be blown about by hurricane winds. Install hurricane shutters, cover windows with boards, or close drapes. If a room must be occupied during the hurricane and window protection is not available, windows may be crisscrossed with tape to slightly reduce flying glass.
3. Verify that vital records are in a safe storage area. Files, records, and storage

cabinets may be wrapped in plastic for moisture protection. If necessary, temporarily relocate records to a safe storage facility off-site.

4. Confirm availability of necessary computer support.
5. Ensure that all vehicles are serviced and fueled. Determine where they can be stored to safely weather the storm.
6. Inventory hurricane emergency supplies and restock if necessary.
7. Dismiss essential employees temporarily so they can secure their personal property before returning to duty.

HURRICANE WARNING

1. Move desks, files, equipment and furniture away from un-shuttered windows. Papers, drawings, etc. should be placed inside files or desks. Wrap office equipment, such as copy machine and computers, in plastic to protect against water damage.
2. Dismiss all non-essential personnel.
3. Turn off all air conditioners, disconnect electrical equipment, turn off lights.

AFTER THE HURRICANE

1. Assess basic damages at work site including roof, water, damage and broken windows.
2. Initiate clean-up of work-site.
3. Do not turn on computer equipment if there are indications of low voltage power fluctuations, low air conditioning output, water under raised floor, broken windows or damaged equipment.
4. Employees return to work according to staffing schedule.

The information contained in this newsletter provides general risk management ideas only. Any program adopted by your institution should be tailored to the needs of your entity. In addition, it is advisable to seek legal and other professional advice when adopting risk management procedures.