



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Resource Document

### Autumn

## National Preparedness Month--Hurricanes

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### Narrative:

September is the annual National Preparedness Month, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The program's goal is to educate the public about how to prepare for emergencies, including natural disasters, mass casualties, biological and chemical threats, radiation emergencies, and terrorist attacks.

The four steps in the program urge citizens to: Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Be Informed and Get Involved.

A major event such as a hurricane striking a populated area could cause massive destruction and casualties unless steps are taken to prepare for the event.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone or severe tropical storm that forms in the southern Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

All Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal areas are subject to hurricanes. Parts of the Southwest United States and the Pacific Coast also experience heavy rains and floods each year from hurricanes spawned off Mexico. The Atlantic hurricane season lasts from June to November, with the peak season from mid-August to late October. The Eastern Pacific hurricane season begins May 15 and ends Nov. 30.

### Key Messages:

- Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to coastlines and areas miles inland.
- Hurricanes can produce winds exceeding 155 miles per hour as well as tornadoes and microbursts.
- Additionally, hurricanes can create storm surges along the coast and cause extensive damage from heavy rainfall.

- Floods and flying debris from the excessive winds are often the deadly and destructive results of these weather events.
- Slow moving hurricanes traveling into mountainous regions tend to produce especially heavy rain.
- Excessive rain can trigger landslides or mud slides. Flash flooding can occur due to intense rainfall.

### **Talking points:**

- Preparation is key to minimizing damage and casualties from hurricanes.
- Follow the four steps recommended by FEMA:
  - **Get an Emergency Kit**--If disaster strikes your community, you might not have access to food, water, or electricity for some time. By taking time now to prepare emergency water supplies, food supplies and a disaster supplies kit, you can provide for your entire family.
  - **Make an Emergency Plan**--Make plans with your family and friends in case you're not together during an emergency. Discuss how you'll contact each other, where you'll meet, and what you'll do in different situations. Ask about planning at your workplace and your child's school or daycare center.
  - **Be Informed**--Being prepared means staying informed. Check all types of media – web sites, newspapers, radio, TV, mobile and land phones – for global, national and local information. During an emergency, your local emergency management or emergency services office will give you information on such things as open shelters and evacuation orders.
  - **Get Involved**--Look into taking first aid and emergency response training, participating in community exercises, and volunteering to support local first responders.

### **Tips:**

- Stay in touch with developing weather and be prepared to take action.
- Have an emergency kit ready to go when needed. If a hurricane threatens, store shelves may empty quickly and prevent you from gathering necessary supplies.
- Don't be caught unprepared. Have a plan that involves all family members and pets.
- The time to prepare is before a storm hits. Each household should have an emergency supply of one gallon of water per person per day for three days, non-perishable food and medications to supply three days, as well as baby supplies such as diapers, formula and food, pet food, identification for every member of the household along with cash, fueled and serviced transportation, batteries for flashlights and radios.
- Families should have an emergency plan, know the location of the safe room at home, work, and school and identify both local and out-of-town contacts.

- If there is a need to evacuate, be familiar with evacuation routes. If you remain at home or evacuate, there's always the need to prepare a home for a storm by securing loose objects in the yard, board windows if necessary and if you have a generator, test it.
- For residents who ride out a storm at home, stay indoors and away from windows. Be sure to go to your safe room if you hear a tornado or tornado sirens. Stay tuned to local media for the latest weather conditions and alerts. Try to stay calm; your family members and pets will usually follow your cue.
- After the storm, assess the damage to your home. Be on the lookout for downed power lines. Use generators and chainsaws safely. In the event of a power outage longer than 4-6 hours, refrigerated food will likely be spoiled. A full freezer of food should keep for up to two days. If you evacuated, do not return home until you receive the all-clear from local officials.

**Historical reference:**

<http://www.ready.gov/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/beready/>

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/nationalpreparednessmonth>

[www.FEMA.gov](http://www.FEMA.gov).

<https://safety.army.mil/>

**Statistics:**

Hurricane Katrina was one of the strongest storms to impact the coast of the United States during the last 100 years. With sustained winds during landfall of 125 mph, a strong category three hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale, and minimum central pressure, the third lowest on record at landfall (920 mb), Katrina caused widespread devastation along the central Gulf Coast states of the U.S. Cities such as New Orleans, Mobile, Ala., and Gulfport, Miss., bore the brunt of Katrina's force.

Other storms have had stronger sustained winds when they made landfall including the following:

- The Labor Day Hurricane, Fla., Keys, Sept. 2, 1935, Category 5, 892 mb, approaching 200 mph
- Hurricane Camille, Miss., Aug. 17, 1969, Category 5, 909 mb, approaching 190 mph
- Hurricane Andrew, Southeast Fla., Aug. 24, 1992, Category 5, 922 mb, 165 mph
- Hurricane Charley, Punta Gorda, Fla., Aug. 13, 2004, Category 4, 941 mb, 150 mph

The most deadly hurricane to strike the U.S. made landfall in Galveston, Texas, on Sept. 8, 1900. This was also the greatest natural disaster to ever strike the U.S., claiming more than 8,000 lives when the storm surge caught the residents by surprise.

To put in perspective the potential damage a hurricane brings with it, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center, 2012 saw 11 weather and climate disaster events each with losses exceeding \$1 billion in damage. This makes 2012 the second costliest year since 1980, with a total of more than \$110 billion in damages throughout the year.

The 2012 total damages rank only behind 2005, which incurred \$160 billion in damages due in part to four devastating land-falling hurricanes.

The 2012 billion-dollar events included seven severe weather and tornado events, two tropical cyclone events, and the yearlong drought and its associated wildfires. These 11 events killed over 300 people and had devastating economic effects on the areas impacted. With 11 events, 2012 also ranks second highest in total number of billion-dollar events behind 2011, which had 14 events.

The two major drivers of the damage costs in 2012 were Hurricane Sandy at approximately \$65 billion and the yearlong drought at approximately \$30 billion. Sandy's large size, with tropical storm force winds extending nearly 500 miles from the center, led to record storm surge, large-scale flooding, wind damage, and mass power outages along much of the East Coast.

The yearlong drought, which affected more than half the country for the majority of 2012, was the largest drought extent in the United States since the 1930s. U.S. Department of Agriculture Drought Disaster Declarations reached more than 2,600 of the nation's 3,143 counties. While drought impacts are often most costly to agricultural centers, their conditions also led to several devastating wildfires that burned over nine million acres nationwide during 2012.