



# GuideOne Center for Risk Management Fact Sheet: Hurricane Preparedness and Response

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Hurricane season officially runs from June 1 through November 30. Historically, the most active period during hurricane season is August through October. Those who live on or near the eastern and gulf coasts know that hurricane season brings with it a special set of circumstances that require preparation, vigilance, and response. Many of the same steps necessary for homeowners and businesses in these areas also apply to schools.

## Understanding the Terms

It is a good idea to become familiar with the terminology forecasters and authorities will use in connection with a hurricane. According to the [International Hurricane Protection Association](#), there are four levels of concern:

- **Tropical Disturbance:** An organized system of clouds and thunderstorms without a defined circulation.
- **Tropical Storm:** An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39 to 73 mph.
- **Hurricane Watch:** Hurricane conditions are possible within 36 to 48 hours. You should begin preliminary preparations to protect life and property. Stay tuned to a radio or television for weather updates.
- **Hurricane Warning:** Hurricane conditions are expected in 24 to 36 hours. You should complete all hurricane preparations. Follow evacuation instructions from local officials. Leave immediately after an evacuation notice is issued to avoid delays.

In addition, hurricanes are categorized according to their wind velocity. The [Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale](#) utilized by the National Hurricane Center categorizes hurricanes as follows:

- **Category 1:** Winds of 74 to 95 mph
- **Category 2:** Winds 96 to 110 mph
- **Category 3:** Winds 111 to 129 mph
- **Category 4:** Winds 130 to 156 mph
- **Category 5:** Winds 157 mph and above

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## Preparing for a Hurricane

While nothing can be done to prevent a hurricane from making landfall, there are a number of steps school leaders can take to prepare for the hurricane's arrival. These steps include:

- **Insurance** – Annually, before hurricane season, it would be beneficial to check with your insurance agent to make sure you have the coverage needed for hurricane damage. Also ask what response is suggested should there be damage.
- **Inventory and Data Back-Up** – It is a good idea to maintain a written inventory, together with photos and/or video, of all the contents of your school. Such an inventory will assist in the insurance claim should your school building be damaged or destroyed in a storm. Also, keep a copy of the inventory, photos, and video in a secure, off-site location. Make sure that important electronic data and vital paper records (such as property deeds) are backed up and copies stored off-site as well.
- **Emergency Contact Information** – Compile a list of important phone numbers, such as staff, key leaders or volunteers and maintain a copy of this list at a secure, off-site location. Include your insurance agent, significant contractors and local utility companies on the list, as well as local police, fire and hospitals.
- **Windows** – Ideally, hurricane shutters should be used to cover all windows. Facilities with stained-glass windows need additional protection, as the cost to replace them is more significant. Though plywood is often recommended, a framed cover made of plywood (at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick) or a manufactured hurricane shutter offers better protection from breakage or other damage. The key to protection is having the window cover adequately fastened down with screws, washers and anchors. Taping windows is not recommended. All covers should be pre-fitted, drilled and properly marked as to where they are to be used.
- **Doors** – Doors should be made of solid wood or hollow metal and have at least three heavy-duty hinges with a dead bolt security lock. The door framing should be securely anchored to the wall structure. Head or foot bolts on the inactive door of double-entry doors can add additional protection.
- **Roofs** – All roofs should be in good repair. Old framing and roofing materials will often succumb to the high winds and rain associated with a hurricane. For shingled roofs, make sure that shingles are properly secured to the roof especially along the edge of the roof perimeter. All roof openings, such as vents, should be sealed. Further, the use of hurricane straps or clips will give much greater protection. They can be retrofitted from the attic or when the roofing is replaced.
- **Gutters and Downspouts** – Make sure that gutters and downspouts are cleared of leaves, twigs, and other material that could clog them and prevent water from draining away from the building.
- **Wall Openings** – In addition to windows and doors, wall openings, such as garage doors should be strengthened and vents should be covered. Kits are available to strengthen and secure garage doors.



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- **Outside** – Anything that can blow away or cause damage to your building should be secured. This includes all outdoor furniture, signage, canopies, and playground equipment. It also includes having trees with dead or dying limbs removed. Keep tree branches trimmed away from the building and bushes also should be kept trimmed.
  - **Utilities** – Assuming the school building will not be occupied during a hurricane, consider shutting off gas and electrical supply, particularly to parts of the building that might be flooded.
  - **Inside** – Secure valuable contents, such as relics, fine arts, and audio-visual equipment. Make sure that any openings (windows or doors) to rooms where valuable contents reside have been storm-proofed to the greatest extent possible. Like homeowners, school leaders should have the necessary equipment on hand to weather the storm. If your facility might be used as an emergency shelter, adequate amounts of water, flashlights, radios, communication devices, medical kits, toiletry items, towels and wash cloths, blankets, food, and spare cash should be stocked and ready to handle a larger group.

## During the Storm

While the hurricane is impacting your area, there is not a great deal that can be done other than to “weather the storm.”

- **Evacuation** – Certainly, when authorities say to evacuate, you should do so. Have maps and an evacuation route pre-planned. Let others know where you will be staying and how they can contact you.
- **Stay Informed** – Keep abreast of storm-related developments by staying tuned to local newscasts or an NOAA weather radio.
- **Stay Safe** – Do not venture out into the storm, even to check on the school building, until local authorities indicate that it is safe to do so.

## Recovery from a Hurricane

Once you are advised by local authorities that it is safe to return to the area, consider the following precautions:

- **Travel with Care** – Use caution while driving through storm-damaged areas. Be extra vigilant for downed tree limbs, branches, power lines, and debris in the roadway. Also, do not drive through standing water.
- **Inspect with Care** – When you arrive at the school property, start by inspecting the outside of the building. Look carefully for dangers, such as structural damage, unsecured or downed power lines, standing water, and broken windows or pipes. If you have any doubts about safety, have the building inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering. Do not enter if you smell gas, observe any downed power lines, or if floodwaters remain around the building. If it is safe to enter the building, do so cautiously. Use flashlights for lighting, not candles. Do not attempt to re-start electrical or mechanical systems without consulting with a qualified contractor. Information on the restoration process is available from the Hartford Steam Boiler Company at [www.hsb.com/cmsfiles/HurricaneLossPrevention.pdf](http://www.hsb.com/cmsfiles/HurricaneLossPrevention.pdf).

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- **Claims** – Report building damage to your insurance company. Take photographs of the damage. You may need to make temporary repairs, such as covering a broken window to prevent further damage from the weather. Make sure to retain receipts for any such temporary repairs and turn them into your insurance company.

Preparing and protecting property and people during a hurricane is an act of good stewardship. Organizations that plan well can be beacons of light to those within their community during a difficult time. Further, solid preparation and response can reduce the possibility of compounding an already difficult situation, saving valuable resources and more importantly protecting lives.

### **Additional Resources for Hurricane Preparedness and Recovery**

- National Hurricane Center: [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.ready.gov/hurricanes](http://www.ready.gov/hurricanes)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/)
- The Institute for Business and Safety: [www.disastersafety.org/hurricane/](http://www.disastersafety.org/hurricane/)