

Before the Storm: The Countdown

Fortunately hurricanes today don't "just happen." They give us at least some warning. For example, Hurricane Hugo first hit Guadeloupe, on the next day Montserrat, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, then two days it traveled the ocean gaining in intensity, hitting South Carolina on the fifth day. There isn't enough time to develop plans, but there **is** ample time to implement plans already developed.

At the Beginning of Hurricane Season (June)

1. Conduct another walk-through of your institution. Look for changes since the plan was implemented, tested, or revised. Determine what changes in the plan may be required.
2. Check your hurricane plan and update it as necessary. If there are changes, make new copies and send it out to all staff members. Otherwise, send a memo to all staff members advising them of hurricane season and asking them to review the previously developed hurricane plan.
3. Inventory and check your disaster supplies (ideally this should be done every six months, but we know nobody will do it that often). Replace batteries; check food supplies, tape, photographic film, and other items that can "go bad." Make sure that all of the items are present. If you are relying on materials from other parts of the building, be sure those items still exist and are where your hurricane disaster plan says they should be.
4. Verify the operation of the standby generator, if present. Check that its fuel tank is full and that the fuel is uncontaminated (this should be done on a regular basis by the physical plant, but follow up with them -- don't let it slip).
5. Double check information with outside disaster recovery vendors or suppliers; notify them of any changes in your situation or needs. Cross check services and costs so you will have the latest information.
6. Make sure the grounds crew carefully trims all trees so they don't pose a threat to the building. Ideally there will be no trees close enough to the building to cause direct damage. Dead wood should be removed to reduce wind-blown debris.
7. Contact your insurance carrier and review your policy. Make sure that new equipment or collections are covered. make sure that copies of updated insurance papers are included in your disaster supplies.
8. Review previously established safe havens inland where you plan to send priority collections and other important data. Verify that they are still operating and accessible.

When a Hurricane Heads Your Way

1. Notify all staff that a potential hurricane disaster may occur and that the plan is being implemented.
2. Begin hourly, around-the-clock monitoring of the storm. Begin tracking the storm.
3. Have key people in the hurricane preparedness team provide you with 24-hour schedules, including locations. If possible, assign beepers so the staff can be summoned immediately, if necessary.
4. Refresh the staff regarding their responsibilities after the storm is over. Make a determination of when different staff members should report to work (you probably won't want everyone coming in all at once, before the assessment of damage is completed). Make sure everyone knows what they are supposed to do after the

storm -- there will be little hope of communicating with your staff during the first 48 hours after a storm, so plan ahead.

When a Hurricane Watch Is Announced

Remember that a Hurricane Watch for your area means that a hurricane or incipient hurricane conditions pose a possible threat, generally within the next 36 hours.

1. Notify all employees that a Hurricane watch has been announced and your institution is entering an advanced stage of preparedness. Free as many staff as possible from routine duties, even if this means announcing that your institution is closing to the public to begin preparations.
2. If the Hurricane Watch is announced at night, notify key employees by phone and have them begin preparations at once -- do not wait until morning, since by then you might be under a Hurricane Warning.
3. Notify outside contractors that you may be calling on their services in 24 to 48 hours. This will alert them to begin monitoring your situation.
4. If you are going to use off-site storage of high priority collections and data, begin packing now. Arrange to rent a sufficient size van or truck (you will have already worked out payment details, driver, size of vehicle needed, and company). The vehicle should be automatic shift, have air conditioning, and an AM/FM radio. Be sure to have a first aid kit and fire extinguisher put in the cab. At this point, however, you will not be able to decide where the safe destination may be.
5. Begin preparations in the building. Have staff members clear their desks. All papers, files, collections, and other materials must be put under cover. At this point basic patron services must be terminated.
6. Identify shelters established by the city and make sure this information is distributed to all staff members -- just in case they need the assistance. Make sure that elderly, pregnant, or disabled staff members have assistance and release them from further duties.
7. Fill water storage containers and make sure they are stored in two different areas of the building in locations where, if they rupture, collections will not be damaged.
8. Make sure all of your institution's vehicles are filled with gas. It is also a good idea to install locking gas caps, since others will steal gas during an emergency.
9. Contact your local freezer company to reserve space, if necessary. If you wait longer, it is likely that no space will be available.

When a Hurricane Warning Is Announced

A hurricane warning for your area means that it is likely a hurricane is likely to come ashore within the next 24 hours or less. If a hurricane's path or history has been unusual or erratic, the warning may be issued only a few hours before the beginning of hurricane conditions. At this point there is absolutely no time to waste.

1. Immediately install hurricane shutters, if present. Board windows, as previously described, if possible. Brace double doors and garage or loading dock doors. Limit building access to one or two points so the others can be shut down. Caulk around shutters, under doors -- any place that water could enter. Silicone caulk will easily peel up afterwards.

2. Take in all loose objects on the grounds -- benches, bird baths, art works, anything that is bolted to concrete. secure trash cans, gates, and garden hoses. Take down awnings and other items which may blow away.
3. Obtain several hundred dollars in petty cash for post-hurricane emergency supplies.
4. Take half of your institution's vehicles to a public parking garage. While they may be damaged by flying debris, these facilities are typically well built and are likely to withstand even major hurricanes. You may not be able to retrieve the vehicles for several days, but this will at least maximize their potential for survival.
5. Vehicles left at your facility should be put under cover if possible. If there is no cover, park the vehicle as close to the building as possible -- that way at least one side may be protected from wind and flying debris. Try to anticipate the direction of the wind and park the vehicles on the downwind side.
6. Based on the best available storm projections, determine to which safe site you will send the priority collections, catalogs, accession records, membership records, and computer data. Then determine the best and safest route to this location. The vehicle should be equipped with a portable cellular phone if at all possible, as well as a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, AM/FM radio, and maps. There should be two drivers. The vehicle should leave before roads become clogged.
7. If possible, move collections away from windows (this becomes even more important if you don't have hurricane shutters). Move collections from bottom floors if there is any potential for flooding.
8. Take second priority collections to the safest locations in the building (preferably interior rooms or rooms with no windows which are not on top floors) and cover with plastic sheeting. Securely tape this sheeting so it won't blow off.
9. Cover all desks, computers, copiers, and other equipment with plastic sheeting. Securely tape this down by running tape around the items.
10. Cover as many collections as possible in vulnerable areas, but remember that this is your last priority.
11. If your institution has any rooftop items (antennas or satellite dishes), remove them if possible.
12. If there is a staff lounge with a refrigerator, turn it to the coldest setting. If your facility has a walk-in cooler, turn it to the lowest setting.
13. Based on last-minute weather bulletins and the advice of local authorities, determine if there is a need for staff to stay in the building. If not, all staff should leave the institution, securing the last hurricane shutters as they leave. Be sure to leave power to essential equipment (security, fire, emergency lighting, and environmental controls) on. The rest can be cut off. Likewise, if your HVAC system does not use gas, but there are gas lines entering the building, shut them off at the main.
14. Advise police and fire chiefs of your status.

Summary

There are certain very important activities you **MUST** begin before there is even a hint of a storm to improve the chances that your collections will survive. You must:

- decide on a chain of command, keeping in mind that not all employees will act rationally during an emergency and that not all employees will be available or able to get in to the facility after the storm.
- decide if your institution will handle all, part, or none of its recovery from the storm, and make the necessary arrangements with outside companies if their services will be used.

- decide if you may need an emergency large-scale generator. If so, make the contacts now so the company will know your needs, location, and hook-up requirements.
- prepare your list of emergency supplies and obtain them immediately. This will ensure, if the worst happens, you are as well prepared as possible.
- determine what should be stored off-site during a hurricane emergency. You may decide on special items in your collection, computer back-up disks, membership lists, etc.
- establish your plan and be sure that all staff are familiar with all parts of the plan, knowing what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and why they are doing it.