ARE YOU READY?

Somerset County Department of Health
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Get Ready
www.aphagetready.org

How to get ready for hurricanes

Unlike tornadoes, which can strike with little warning, hurricanes are much easier to predict, usually giving residents in high-risk areas time to prepare. But like most disasters, it's best to get prepared while the weather is nice outside and well before a threat occurs.

What's a hurricane?

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Hurricanes are large tropical storms that form over warm ocean waters. A tropical storm becomes a hurricane once its winds reach 74 miles per hour. Once a hurricane forms, officials can estimate the path it will travel and how strong it will become. There are five categories of hurricanes, and a category five is most dangerous. People living in the nation's coastal communities, particularly those along the Atlantic and Gulf Coast regions, are at highest risk. In addition to dangerous winds, hurricanes can cause flooding, storm surges and tornadoes.

Making preparations

Preparing a hurricane emergency supply kit is critical if you live in an at-risk area. While not all hurricanes are accompanied with evacuation orders, the storm can still leave you without power and access to roads.

Make sure your kit includes a three- to five-day supply of water and non-perishable food, with one gallon of water stored for each person per day. For example, if you have four people in your household, you'll need 12 gallons of water for a three-day supply. Enough water is especially important if you lose power during hot summer months. Prepare enough food and water for pets too.

Your supply kit should also include a first aid kit, manual can opener, flashlight, batteries, a battery-operated radio, clothing and bedding, copies of important documents, hygiene supplies and hand sanitizer, water-purifying agents, and needed medical supplies, such as prescriptions or contact lenses. It's also a good idea to prepare a portable emergency supply kit that includes maps and booster cables in case of evacuation. Make sure to check and update your stockpile regularly and switch out expired food items.

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Learn about your community's hurricane warning system, evacuation routes and nearby hurricane shelters. Some hurricane shelters are equipped to house people with special medical needs, so alert local officials ahead of time if you or a loved one will need assistance staying safe. Also, most shelters won't allow you to bring your pets, so plan accordingly.

To protect your home and reduce the risk of flying debris, cover doors and windows with board or place large strips of heavy tape across windows to prevent them from shattering. Secure any items outside your home that could become flying debris. Fill sinks and bathtubs with water and adjust refrigerators to the coolest temperature. Make sure your vehicles are filled with gas.

Listen to officials

If local officials issue a hurricane watch, it means a hurricane is possible in your area. A hurricane warning is issued if it is expected to hit your community.

While the decision to leave your home can be hard, do not ignore evacuation orders. If you have time before evacuating, turn off the gas, electricity and water. Once you're on the road, follow designated evacuation routes, as they are the safest way to get to shelter. Also, make sure your family emergency plan includes a pre-designated meeting place in case you have to evacuate in a hurry and all family members are not together.

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If evacuation orders aren't given and you decide to remain at home, stay inside until officials say it's safe to leave. A calm in the storm can mean that the hurricane's "eye" is passing over and dangerous winds will continue after it's passed. And in case your home is too damaged to stay in after the hurricane is over, be ready to evacuate to a nearby shelter or make contingency plans to stay with friends or relatives.

Lastly, be neighborly. Restoring power after a hurricane can take days or even weeks. If you get power back before others in your neighborhood, lend a helping hand.

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