

# Emergency shelter FACTS

Many shelters in Virginia operate under a system developed by the American Red Cross. Shelter staffing can include any combination of municipal, social services and school employees with Red Cross volunteers.

## Facts about emergency public shelters:

- They provide emergency, short-term shelter to the public.
- Shelters outside the storm surge and flood zones meet state building codes and provide a safer place for people who must leave hazardous areas. All shelters in the path of a hurricane are subject to high winds.
- Public shelters may be called refuge centers (no services and located on barrier islands or near evacuation routes), host shelters (inland) or impact shelters (in the storm's path).

**Emergency shelters may not be able to provide adequate supplies of food, water and bedding, so individuals coming to shelters should bring the following items to support their stay:**

- Pillows, blankets, sleeping bags or air mattresses
- Extra clothing, shoes, eyeglasses, etc.
- Folding chairs, lawn chairs or cots
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Flashlights and batteries
- Quiet games, books and favorite toys
- Important papers
- Prescription medications

**Pets are not allowed in public shelters. Consider options that include kennels or an animal shelter. Only service animals can stay with their owner in the shelter.**

**Emergency shelters operate under Red Cross guidelines and provide basic first aid only. Individuals receiving home health care should consult their physician or home health provider concerning plans for health care needs and possible evacuation during an emergency.**

**In major hurricanes, inland host shelters will be available in central and western Virginia.**

**Each locality has a list of facilities (often public schools) that may be used as emergency shelters. In the event of a hurricane, however, some of these facilities may be in the path of the storm or at risk of flooding. When a hurricane is threatening Virginia, turn to your local radio or TV station for listings. You will hear where these shelters are located and when they will open.**

## How Evacuation Decisions are Made

The decision to evacuate is made by local officials in coordination with other jurisdictions in the region. This normally involves conference calls with local and state officials as well as the National Weather Service. Computerized tracking and analysis models are also helpful in deciding if or when to evacuate. Key factors in evacuation decision-making include:

- Providing enough time for people in storm surge zones and mobile homes to leave before the arrival of 39 mph winds;
  - Selecting an appropriate evacuation time to allow citizens to get to safety during daylight hours; and
  - Providing the news media with enough time to warn the greatest number of people.
- People have several choices for their evacuation destination. They can stay with family or friends or go to a hotel or public shelter outside the storm surge zone. Evacuation and shelter openings usually happen simultaneously.

## When to Stay at Home

One of the most important decisions you will have to make is whether to evacuate. If a hurricane threatens, stay tuned to local radio or TV, and if you are asked to evacuate, you should do so without delay. Unless you live in a coastal or low-lying area, an area that floods frequently, or in manufactured housing, it is unlikely that officials will ask you to evacuate. That means that it is important for you and your family to have a plan that makes you as safe as possible in your home.

Everyone in coastal Virginia is at some level of risk for storm surge or flooding. This means everyone needs to prepare, even if your home is reasonably safe and outside flood zones. An innovative idea for hurricane preparedness is the safe room. The concept comes from the tornado-prone regions of the Midwest where residents learn to identify a central area in a structure away from windows and doors and on the first floor. Bathrooms, central hallway closets, or areas under stairwells provide the best locations for protection. During hurricanes, families move into these areas with their disaster supply kit, flashlights and portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio and stay there through the peak of the storm. This area not only provides protection from the wind, but also from tornadoes associated with hurricanes.

# Hurricane Categories

The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale is a 1-5 rating based on the hurricane's present intensity. This is used to give an estimate of the potential property damage and flooding expected along the coast from a hurricane landfall.

## Category One:

Winds 74-95 mph. Storm surge generally 4-5 feet above normal. No real damage to building structures. Damage primarily to unanchored mobile homes, shrubbery, and trees. Some damage to poorly constructed signs. Also, some coastal road flooding and minor pier damage. Hurricanes Allison of 1995 and Danny of 1997 were in this category at peak intensity.

## Category Two:

Winds 96-110 mph. Storm surge generally 6-8 feet above normal. Some roofing material, door, and window damage of buildings. Considerable damage to shrubbery and trees with some trees blown down. Considerable damage to mobile homes, poorly constructed signs and piers. Coastal and low-lying escape routes flood 2-4 hours before arrival of the hurricane center. Small craft in unprotected anchorages break moorings. Hurricane Bonnie of 1998 was a Category Two hurricane when it hit the North Carolina coast, as was Hurricane Georges of 1998 when it hit the Florida Keys and the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

## Category Three:

Winds 111-130 mph. Storm surge generally 9-12 feet above normal. Some structural damage to small residences and utility buildings. Damage to shrubbery and trees with foliage blown off trees and large trees blown down. Mobile homes and poorly constructed signs are destroyed. Low-lying escape routes are cut by rising water 3-5 hours before arrival of the center of the hurricane. Flooding near the coast destroys smaller structures with larger structures

damaged by battering from floating debris. Terrain continuously lower than 5 feet above mean sea level may be flooded inland 8 miles or more. Evacuation of low-lying residences with several blocks of the shoreline may be required. Hurricanes Roxanne of 1995 and Fran of 1996 were in this category at landfall on the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico and in North Carolina, respectively.

## Category Four:

Winds 131-155 mph. Storm surge generally 13-18 feet above normal. More extensive curtainwall failures with some complete roof structure failures on small residences. Shrubs, trees and all signs are blown down. Complete destruction of mobile homes. Extensive damage to doors and windows. Low-lying escape routes may be cut by rising water 3-5 hours before arrival of the center of the hurricane. Major damage to lower floors of structures near the shore. Terrain lower than 10 feet above sea level may be flooded requiring massive evacuation of residential areas as far inland as 6 miles. Hurricane Luis of 1995 was a Category Four hurricane while moving over the Leeward Islands. Hurricanes Felix and Opal of 1995 also reached this status at peak intensity.

## Category Five:

Winds greater than 155 mph. Storm surge generally greater than 18 feet above normal. Complete roof failure on many residences and industrial buildings. Some complete building failures with small utility buildings blown over or away. All shrubs, trees, and signs blown down. Complete destruction of mobile homes. Severe and extensive window and door damage. Low-lying escape routes are cut by rising water 3-5 hours before arrival of the center of the hurricane. Major damage to lower floors of all structures located less than 15 ft above sea level and within 500 yards of the shoreline. Massive evacuation of residential areas on low ground within 5-10 miles of the shoreline may be required. Hurricane Mitch of 1998 was a Category Five hurricane at peak intensity over the western Caribbean. Hurricane Gilbert of 1988 was a Category Five hurricane at peak intensity and is one of the strongest Atlantic tropical cyclones of record.



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- Can you do it yourself, SAFELY? (Consider personal safety, power lines, your knowledge of chainsaws, and your home)
- Use caution with suspended weight (Trees are extremely heavy, unpredictable, and using a ladder can get you hurt)
- Can you live with the mess for a while? (How critical is the cleanup? Prices are much better a month or so after the storm)
- If you feel the price is too high then it probably is (get a second estimate, preferably from a local; free markets always prevail)
- Get a written detailed estimate that describes exactly what will be done (don't get the tree off the house but left in your yard)
- Deposits, if necessary at all, should be no more than 10% of the job and not more than you can lose
- WAIT: high pressure contracts usually are more concerned with their wallet and not with helping you
- What skills and appropriate equipment does the contractor have? Was he an arborist or a landscaper before the storm?

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