Surviving the season

It's that time of year again – learn how to protect yourself, your family and your home during hurricane season

Are you prepared for a major hurricane? When a hurricane strikes the Houston/Galveston area, your life and property will be in danger – not only when the storm threatens, but potentially during recovery if you haven't made plans for your evacuation and return.

Some of the things you can do to prepare for a hurricane, such as assembling a supply kit and developing a family communications plan, are the same for most emergencies. With a little planning and common sense, you can be better prepared for the unexpected.

Bob Gaffney, JSC Emergency Preparedness Manager and a member of the JSC Hurricane Rideout Team, encourages employees to make plans for their personal protection well in advance of a hurricane.

"Now would be a good time," Gaffney said. "Personal protection plans should anticipate the arrival of tropical storm-force winds 12 hours or more before a hurricane makes landfall, and expect more of the same on the backside of the hurricane. People who don't evacuate in advance of a severe storm could be isolated in their homes for an extended period of time before community officials are able to restore damaged utilities and re-establish normal municipal operations," Gaffney said.

The first step: a personal disaster plan

When creating your personal disaster plan, realize that you must be prepared to take care of yourself. Texas does not have mandatory evacuation requirements; you cannot be forced to leave your home. If you choose not to evacuate, emergency management officials will not be able to come to your aid when rising water threatens, your home is flooded and there is no electricity. You must be prepared to survive by yourself for three to seven days with a sufficient supply of food and water.

Check with your city or county office of emergency management for evacuation routes and plan alternate routes in case of flooding or traffic congestion. Don't wait until a hurricane is in the Gulf.

Insurance on your property and personal belongings is another important part of your disaster preparedness – but it must be done now. Once a hurricane is in the Gulf, policies cannot be written. To be sure that your insurance claims will be paid, you must document your property and its contents not only with written lists, but also with pictures or videos.

Stay or Leave?

In general, the ultimate decision to stay or leave will be yours. Study the following list and carefully consider the factors involved:

- Make plans for action at the beginning of hurricane season (June)
- Learn the storm surge history and elevation of your area
- Learn safe routes inland
- Learn location of official shelters
- Trim back dead wood from trees around your home
- Check for loose rain gutters and downspouts
- If shutters do not protect windows, stock boards to cover glass
- If you live on the coastline or offshore islands, plan to leave
- If you live near a river or in a flood plain, plan to leave
- If you live in a mobile home, always plan to relocate

Please take these suggestions seriously now while there is time to get ready. You must be prepared to take care of yourselves and be responsible for your safety. You can build a new home and buy new furniture, but you and your loved ones have to survive first.

Evacuation smarts

Deciding on an evacuation destination ahead of time is important. If you are staying with family or friends, check before you leave that they will be home. If you are going to a hotel, call for a reservation before you leave. Be sure to have a full tank of gas and a map with alternate routes to your destination marked in case of flooding or traffic jams.

If you have followed your disaster plan and taken the necessary steps to be prepared for a hurricane, you will be able to evacuate immediately when local officials give the recommendation. The evacuation recommendation will be given as early as possible to allow time for everyone to leave. The sun will be shining; there will be no rain, wind or high tide. But if you do not leave then, it may be too late. If you wait until you are certain the hurricane is going to make landfall in this area, you may be unable to leave. The roads could be flooded, and high winds will make it dangerous to cross bridges or high-level freeways. You will be trapped.

As for evacuation traffic, a lot of people forget that getting up Houston's main highways isn't a problem during the initial stages of evacuation. The problem occurs outside of Houston, where all escape routes are reduced to two-lane roads that become jammed quickly and then back up into the city. If your emergency plan includes evacuation, you have the best chance of succeeding if you plan ahead to leave early and stick to your agenda.

If you cannot evacuate by yourself because of physical/medical reasons or lack of transportation, you must ask family members, neighbors, friends or your church group for help. Local and county governments may not be able to help you evacuate. There is no public transportation specifically designated for evacuation. Legal and liability issues add to the problem. Call your community's emergency management office and inquire about what help is available.

If you decide to go to a Red Cross shelter, be aware of the following fact: there will be no Red Cross shelters open in coastal communities before or during a hurricane. You need to go north of Harris County to seek shelter for safety reasons. Also, there is no medical help available in a Red Cross shelter. After the hurricane, shelters will be open in coastal communities for people whose homes have been damaged or destroyed.

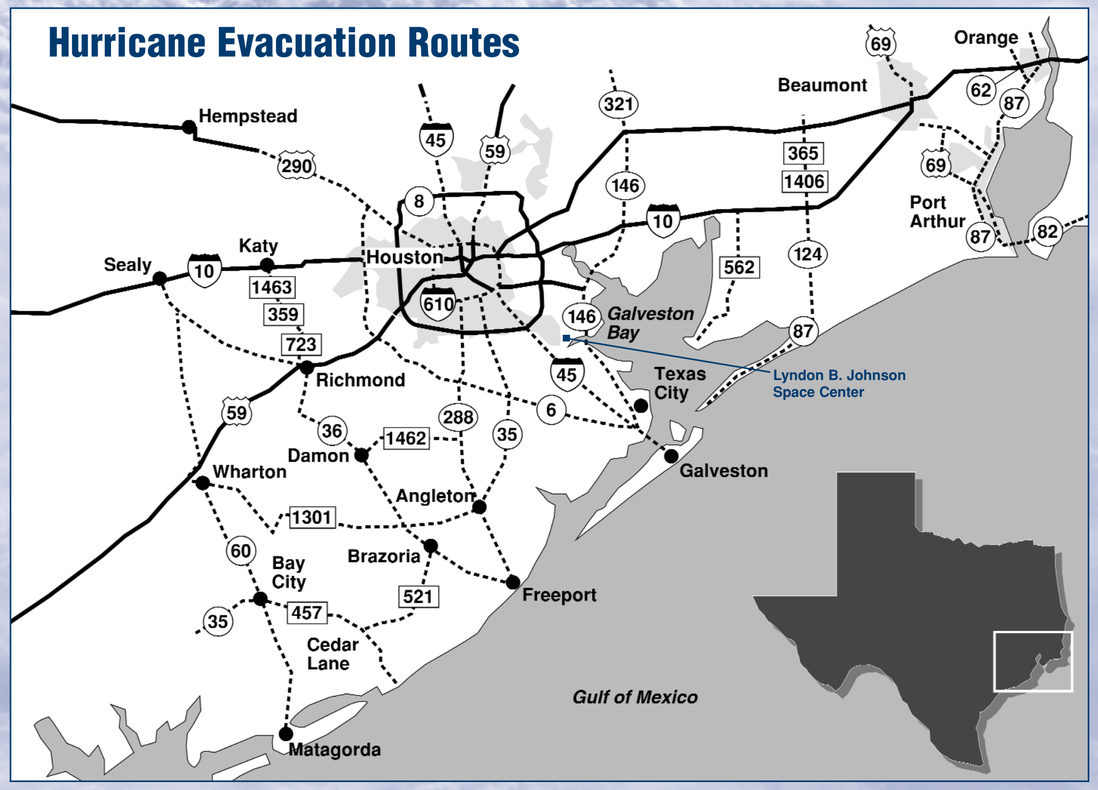
Returning home

Residents of evacuated areas will not be allowed to return to their homes until public safety, health and emergency management officials declare that the community is safe for them to do so.

Supplies that you need to have stored at home to use when you return include bottled water, flashlights and lanterns, batteries, and nonperishable foods.

Insurance

Before evacuating, put inventories and pictures of your valuables, as well as your insurance policy, in a safe deposit box or other safe place away from your home. Secure your home as much as possible before leaving. Leave a telephone number where you can be reached. Paint your address and telephone number on a piece of wood or the side of your home. Don't paint your insurance policy number.



Emergency Numbers

JSC Emergency Information Line	x33351	El Lago	281-326-2658
(toll free)	1-877-283-1947	Friendswood	281-996-3335
JSC Employee News Service	x36765	Galveston (city)	409-797-3710
Emergency	911	Galveston County (north)	1-800-393-0203
Harris County Flood Control		Harris County	713-881-3100
(river levels)	713-881-3100	Hitchcock	409-986-5559
National Weather Service	281-337-7895	Houston (city)	713-884-4500
Texas Highway Department		LaMarque	409-938-9260
(road closures)	1-800-452-9292	La Porte	281-471-3607
Emergency Management Offices		League City	281-338-4837
American Red Cross	713-526-8300	Nassau Bay	281-333-4200
Galveston County	409-945-7200	Pasadena	281-475-5588
Pasadena	713-943-7000	Pearland	281-652-1951
Clear Lake Office	281-282-6039	Santa Fe	409-925-2000
Baytown	1-281-420-6556	Seabrook	281-291-5610
Clear Lake Shores	281-538-0659	Taylor Lake Village	281-326-2843
Deer Park	281-478-7298	Texas City	409-643-5707
Dickinson	281-337-4700	Webster	281-332-2711

After the storm, immediately report to your insurance company. It may take a while to reach your agent, so be patient. When you get through, be ready to provide your policy number, address and a phone number where you can be reached, especially if you will be staying elsewhere. Take "after" videotape and still pictures of your home and damage to help with your claim.

Keep receipts for all expenses after the storm, such as repairs, food, lodging and emergency equipment. Much of it may be covered under your insurance and some is tax-deductible.

Make sure to take pictures after repairs are done. If you have another loss, you don't want your agent to think the first repairs were never done.

When the adjuster shows up, ask for identification. Beware of fly-by-night repair operations and always check credentials. ❖

JSC Center Status:
http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/pao/roundup/centerstatus/index/

National Weather Service's National Hurricane Center/Tropical Prediction Center:
http://www.nhc.noaa.gov

What should go into your hurricane preparedness kit?

If you are confined to your home or choose to evacuate as a result of severe weather or disaster, a disaster supply kit can be useful.

- ✔ Keep it readily accessible for safety, comfort and convenience. All household members should know where it is stored.
- ✔ Replace food, water, medical supplies and batteries as needed.
- ✔ Place the items you need during an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container, such as a backpack or plastic storage tub.
- ✔ Select the items your family will need from the suggestions in the Emergency Supply Kit pictured below.
- ✔ Don't use your emergency supply kit at your evacuation destination. You may need it when you return to your community if utilities and grocery stores aren't available for a couple of days. Eat where you are sheltered.

Emergency Supply Kit

- Flashlight
- Tissues
- Radio
- Pocket Knife
- Sanitary Supplies
  - Toothbrush
  - Soap
  - Shampoo
  - Sponge
  - Cleanser
  - Bleach
- Batteries
- Pencils
- Drinks/Juices
- Nuts
- Rice – Pasta
- Soups
- Canned Foods
- Water (1 gal per person per day)

30-gallon trash barrel

- First-Aid Kit
- Medicines
- Rubbing Alcohol
- First-Aid Handbook
- Towels
- Blankets
- Paper Towels
- Toilet Paper
- Candles
- Matches
- Can Opener
- Peanut Butter
- Crackers
- Dried Beans
- Change of Clothing
- Foul Weather Gear
- Sterno, Stove, Fuel
- Garbage Bags
- Cooking Utensils
  - Cooking Pot
  - Plastic Dishes
  - Silverware
  - Aluminum Foil