

HOST HOMES

shelter from the storm



what are host homes?

WHY IS THIS PROGRAM NEEDED?

If a category 3 hurricane is headed to Pinellas County, about 391,000 people would need to evacuate a low-lying area or a mobile home. With approximately 74,000 public shelter spaces, alternative shelter is needed. Some people will head to hotel rooms or they'll hit the road, which could lead to more problems if traffic jams stop the flow. There are safe places to stay right here in Pinellas County, but it requires individuals helping out by opening their homes.

We saw the devastating loss of life that came when Katrina's surging flood waters wiped out entire communities. The Tampa Bay area is at risk for that kind of flooding, but our residents simply don't believe it will ever happen here. The truth is – it can. The other truth is that, despite the media blitz, citizens still are not adequately prepared.

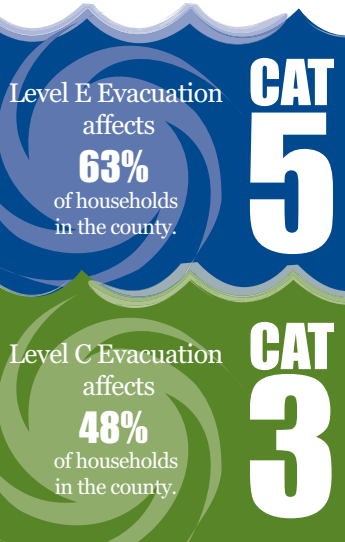
Host homes belong to citizens who live in non-evacuation areas of the county who open their doors to friends, coworkers, fellow parishioners or members of the same club, who in the event of a hurricane, would need to evacuate their own home for safety's sake.

WHY DO THIS THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS?

While there are some efforts to match people using an online service, experience tells us that people are more likely to open their homes to people with whom they have a connection of some type. It also takes a bit of a push to make a program like this work, which is why organizational leadership is needed. It also seems to work better when narrowed down to small groups such as departments within a corporation or Sunday school classes within a large church. As a leader of your organization, you will best know how to encourage participation.

Pinellas County is extremely vulnerable to deadly surge flooding and has limited road access out of town. By best utilizing our own resources, we can make a huge difference when that big storm really does head our way. Do not assume that your employees or members have a plan, because chances are they don't.

By encouraging a Host Homes program, you can save lives – and that's what it's all about.



WHAT CAN MY ORGANIZATION DO TO HELP?

Organizations first need to realize that they have a unique leadership position in the community. Because of the sheer size of the task, local governments can only do so much. Employers, places of worship, civic organizations and community groups can set the example by having their own plan, and they can encourage the employees or members to have plans and act on them. Organizations can also sponsor a volunteer Host Homes program.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS FOR THE HOST HOMES PROGRAM?

Host Homes is not a county program. It is a completely voluntary program run by an organization in a manner that meets specific needs of size, geographic location and level of participation. The county can provide some tools to get started, but the organization can use them at their own discretion, or create their own. The basics of the program are:

1. Identify an individual or a small committee to manage the program
2. Gather information by disseminating a quick survey form that asks about personal plans and determines interest in the Host Homes program
3. Distribute host and guest forms to interested participants and, using that information, match hosts and guests
4. Encourage hosts and guests to speak to each other to confirm details, or hold an informal "meet and greet" event to facilitate the conversation
5. Once the matching is complete, the organization maintains the information in a file or a spreadsheet for updates or to use the following year. The rest is up to the participants