

Approximately 550,000 Pinellas County residents live in an evacuation zone or mobile home. That's over half the total population. So if a hurricane heads in our direction, where will they all go for shelter?

The truth is, public shelters, hotels and evacuation routes out of town won't be enough.

There is a way you can help.

Start a Host Homes Program Today!

Let's talk about our hurricane bottom line. Pinellas County has approximately 550,000 people living in evacuation zones or mobile homes. The county has about 74,000 shelter spaces. Hotel space is limited and the roads will be overcrowded. Add to the equation that, like New Orleans, the Tampa Bay area is extremely vulnerable to hurricane surge flooding. Now add survey results that indicate we have people who live in these low-lying, surge-prone areas who, even after seeing Katrina's flooding, are still not likely to evacuate.

It's a situation that will take everyone working together to solve. Businesses are in a unique role to demonstrate leadership and show concern. When preparing your company, you can also encourage your employees to have a plan and act on it. You can survey your employees so you know their plan, you can encourage them to be a volunteer and you can establish your company's own host home program.

The program is simple. Your company's volunteers or designated staff members take steps to match employees who live in non-evacuation portions of the county with their fellow employees who need to evacuate. The county can provide you with a toolkit to make the process quick and easy to understand.

Host Homes will help take some of the fear out of hurricane season and could save lives. We all remember the tragic scenes from Katrina. Don't let that happen here. Help your employees find shelter from the storm.



For More Information

Communications
(727) 464-4600

Emergency Management
(727) 464-3800

www.pinellascounty.org/emergency

HOST HOMES
shelter from the storm



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.

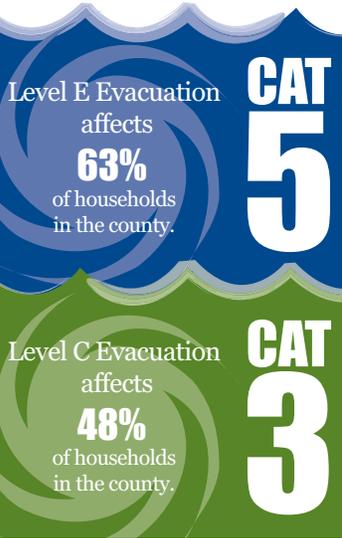
Host homes belong to citizens who live in non-evacuation areas of the county who open their doors to friends, coworkers, fellow parishioners or members of the same club, who in the event of a hurricane, would need to evacuate their own home for safety's sake.

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