

# You're Prepared and the Storm is Bearing Down

NOW WHAT? TIPS FOR DURING AND AFTER THE STORM

## DURING a storm

### WHEN THE STORM'S IMPACT IS FELT

While the approach of a hurricane can be an anxious time, living through the storm can be terrifying. If you live in an ordered evacuation zone, you should already be at your safe place (host home, hotel or shelter). If you are not evacuating, it's time to brave the storm.

#### Here are some important tips to remember:

- Stay tuned to local news or PCC-TV for updates.
- Close interior doors. Secure and brace external doors.
- If power goes out, use your weather radio for alerts. For light, use flashlights, lanterns or chemical light sticks. Avoid burning candles.
- Stay indoors and most importantly, stay calm.
- Parents should extend greater patience and understanding to children having difficulty coping with the situation. Be honest about the danger and reassure them that you are focused on their safety. Do your best to keep them entertained or occupied.
- Do not be fooled if there is a lull; it could be the eye of the storm and winds may pick up again.

### IF YOUR HOME IS BREACHED

Even though you have taken the necessary precautions to protect your home, the exterior can be breached. Debris can break through windows, and trees can crash through your roof. **When this happens, take these immediate actions:**

- Take refuge in a small interior room, closet or hallway on the lowest level of your home. Remember, the center of your house is the safest.
- Lie on the floor under a table or other sturdy object if you cannot make it to a safe room.
- Consider leaving your home **ONLY** if remaining poses an imminent threat to your life.
- Wait until the storm has passed to tend to the damage.



### DRIVING SAFELY

A hurricane can turn a familiar road into an unfamiliar and dangerous one very quickly.

#### Driving safety tips:

- Do not drive through standing water. You will not know the depth of the water nor will you know the condition of the road under the water.
- Match your speed to road conditions. Cars can quickly become uncontrollable when driving on damaged, debris-choked roads.
- Visibility may be limited. Increased traffic on congested roadways and large trucks can obstruct your line of sight.
- Maintain a safe distance from the car in front of you.
- Traffic patterns may be shifted in work zones; obey posted work zone speed limits at all times. Be aware of equipment and workers.
- Constantly scan for pedestrians who can quickly lose their footing.
- Obey all "road closed" signs. Just because you can't see road damage doesn't mean it is safe.
- Treat any intersection with non-working traffic signals as an "all-way" stop. Be prepared to stop at every intersection.
- Not all damaged or destroyed road signs have been replaced. Be prepared to yield to a pedestrian or another driver or to stop unexpectedly.
- Know where you are going and give yourself ample time to get there.
- Drive with car lights on and slow down.



After the storm, it's time to assess the damage. Keep your battery-operated radio close for news reports about damage, road closures, power outages and other emergency instructions. With three to seven days of uncertainty, depending on the storm, you'll need to rely upon what you've stored for food, water, medications and entertainment. If the county is hit with a Category 3, 4 or 5 hurricane, it could be weeks or months before life gets back to normal.

#### Use the following safety steps during recovery:

### GENERATOR SAFETY

Home generators provide limited power during a prolonged power outage. Use them to keep a refrigerator cold, run a fan, recharge your cell phone or operate a microwave oven. Generators can help make your storm recovery more comfortable, but they can also kill if not used correctly. Read instructions carefully and fully understand how to use your specific generator. **Generator safety tips:**

**Carbon Monoxide (CO):** A colorless, odorless gas, produced from burning fuel, that is deadly in very small amounts.

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents. **NEVER** use them in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces or other enclosed or partially-enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Install battery-operated or battery-backup carbon monoxide alarms in your home. Test these alarms often and replace batteries when needed.

### Electrical Hazards

Generators create electricity, which can kill if you receive a shock.

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface in an open area. Dry your hands before handling it.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator or use a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord that is free of cuts or tears and has all three prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- **NEVER** plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding, can cause electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring for appliances, have a qualified electrician install needed equipment and teach you how to use it.

### Fire Hazards

Generators use flammable fuels, increasing the chance of an accidental fire that can threaten your life and property.

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool.
- Always store fuel outside of living areas in labeled containers.
- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.

### CHAINSAW SAFETY

While it is necessary to clear downed trees and branches, use great caution when operating a chainsaw. **Safety tips to help keep you safe and injury-free:**

#### Before Starting the Saw

- Read your owner's manual.
- Wear proper safety gear, including eye and hearing protection, heavy work gloves and work boots.
- Check controls, chain tension, and all bolts and handles to ensure they are functioning properly.
- Fuel your saw at least 10 feet from sources of ignition.
- Clear debris that may interfere with cutting.

#### While Running the Saw

- Keep both hands on the handles.
- Make sure you have secure footing.
- Do not cut directly overhead or overreach.
- Be prepared for kickback.

## AFTER a storm

### FOOD SAFETY AND GUIDELINES

Power outages caused by hurricanes can present health concerns from food spoilage.

#### Tips to help keep you safe:

- Before the storm, take an inventory of the items in your refrigerator and freezer. Put this list on the refrigerator door so you know where everything is located.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Minimal freezer door openings can keep frozen items safe for about two days.
- Refrigerated foods should be safe if the power is out for no more than four to six hours. Discard any food that has been above 40°F for two hours and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture. Never taste food to determine safety!
- If power will be off more than six hours, transfer refrigerated foods to an insulated cooler filled with ice or frozen gel packs. Keep a thermometer in the cooler to be sure the food stays at 40°F or below.

For more information about food safety, call the Pinellas County Health Department at (727) 824-6900 or visit [www.pinellashealth.com](http://www.pinellashealth.com).

### RESTROOM FACILITIES

Improper disposal of human waste can lead to outbreaks of cholera, dysentery and other diseases.

#### Tips for a sewer outage:

- When instructed, do not use or flush your toilet. Powered sewer lift stations may be out of order, which could lead to a sewage back-up into homes.
- Use a chemical toilet if one is available.
- Create an emergency toilet by using your toilet bowl or a five-gallon plastic bucket with a tight-fitting lid. Line either with a heavy-duty trash bag and use household bleach as a disinfectant. If using your toilet bowl, first turn off water and flush one time to empty before lining with trash bag.
- **DO NOT** use 'kitty litter' in your emergency toilet. This cannot be flushed after the sewage system is operational.
- Once given the OK, dispose of the emergency toilet's contents into your household commode.
- Thoroughly sanitize your emergency toilet with bleach before storing or disposal.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling the emergency toilet.

### DRINKING WATER

A "boil-water order" can be issued during a hurricane or any other significant event that affects the drinking water supply. This means there is a possibility of some microbial contamination in tap water. While there are advanced and expensive filters and specialized water treatment tablets on the market that can make your water safe to drink, there are two methods that are typically used by homeowners:

#### Boiling

Boiling is the most effective way to kill bacteria, viruses and parasites in water. According to the Florida State Health Department and the Center for Disease Control, a pot of water that has been brought to a full rolling boil for one minute is enough to kill pathogens and make the water safe to consume. Let the water come to room temperature before drinking.

#### Bleach

Bleach is a less effective way to sanitize water but it can work if you don't have access to power or cooking fuel. Add 1/8 tsp. of common unscented household bleach (containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to a gallon of water and let the water stand for at least 30 minutes.

Remember, these methods work with water that is clear but possibly contaminated, not with murky water taken from a ditch, for example.

For more information, visit the Center for Disease Control food and water safety page at [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater.asp).