

# The storm is here. What should I expect?

Hurricane Irma gave us a small taste of what life could be like in the case of a major hurricane. Power outages and heat were two of the biggest challenges. Expect these conditions to last days and even weeks.

If...	Then...
<b>The Power Goes Out</b>	<b>You will need a battery-powered radio, flashlight, batteries, cell phone and battery charger, non-perishable food, water.</b> Check your emergency kits to make sure you can make it at least a week without power. You will need ways to cook or boil water in the weeks to follow, like an outside grill or camp stove. If you can find an open store you will need cash. You also will want items to keep you occupied: books, board games, etc.
<b>The Power Stays Out for Six Hours</b>	<b>If there is food in the refrigerator,</b> move perishable foods into an ice-filled cooler. Put a thermometer in the cooler to make sure it stays below 40°F. Meats and other perishable foods can stay above 40°F without spoiling for two hours.
<b>The Power Stays Out for Two Days</b>	<b>If there is food in the freezer,</b> it can be stored safely for two days if you keep the freezer door shut. Once the storm passes, cook any unspoiled food outside and consider sharing with your neighbors.  From this point forward you will need non-perishable food.  <i>(When you know a hurricane is coming, if you have a lot of frozen food, use it to prepare your meals. Otherwise you risk having it spoil in a power outage.)</i>
<b>The Water Supply Is Affected</b>	<b>It is always possible that the drinking water supply could be affected during a disaster.</b> Monitor the news for boil water notices, which means there is a possibility of contamination. In this case you should be prepared to disinfect the water.  Boil—Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil for one minute to ensure bacteria, viruses or parasites are gone.  Bleach—Add 1/8 tsp. of unscented bleach per gallon of water and let stand for 30 minutes; bleach should contain 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. This is less effective than boiling, but will work if there is no way to boil water.  Bleach can also be used as a disinfectant for cleaning by mixing nine parts of water to one part bleach.  If water is out, use your emergency supplies.
<b>There Is a Sewer Outage</b>	<b>If a sewer outage is announced, DO NOT flush your toilet.</b> Powered sewer lift stations may be down, which could cause a sewage backup in your home. Use a portable toilet, like one used on a boat or camper, or set one up by using one of the following methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>5-gallon bucket</b>—Line with heavy-duty trash bag and use household bleach as disinfectant. Make sure it has a tight lid.</li><li>● <b>Toilet bowl</b>—Turn off your outside water supply first and flush once to empty before lining with a trash bag.</li></ul> Do not use kitty litter. It cannot be flushed after the sewer system is running. Once given the OK by officials, dispose of the emergency toilet's contents into your household commode. Thoroughly sanitize your emergency toilet with bleach before storing or disposal.
<b>Phone, Cable &amp; Cell Service Is Down</b>	<b>Use a battery- or crank-powered radio</b> —radio broadcasts are usually the last communication source to go down. Get a portable radio and lots of batteries. Tune in to National Weather Service advisories. Severe weather alerts are transmitted through the NOAA Weather Alert Radio. Local radio stations usually report on emergency situations and AM stations can broadcast longer than FM stations.  Pinellas County FM HAR 96.3—Use your radio to tune in to the county station for information on local traffic.  Mobile Text Messaging—Texting often works when other services do not. If your phone's digital clock works, then you can send and receive texts.  Chargers and batteries—Keep your phone and other devices charged. Make sure you have the connection you need to plug into a vehicle, even if you do not own your own car. Invest in a backup battery charger. There are many models, including solar-powered. Do not forget the basic spare batteries for your radio, flashlight and other emergency items. Make sure your extra batteries have not expired.  Apps—Mobile apps were invaluable during Irma. In addition to Pinellas County apps, know which others could be useful, like GasBuddy to find open gas stations or local weather apps. If you have WiFi even if your phone's data is down, check <a href="http://www.pinellascounty.org">www.pinellascounty.org</a> for information on new county apps.
<b>Your Home Is Breached</b>	<b>Take refuge in your safe room</b> —an interior room, closet or hallway on the lowest level of your home. 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 is more dangerous than the weather outside.  Wait until the storm has passed to tend to any damage.

# The storm has passed. Now what?

## Can I start driving once a storm passes?

Do not attempt to travel after the storm passes until officials say it is safe to do so.



- There will be trees, electrical wires and other dangers on the roads.
  - Without power, traffic lights will not be working, making driving very dangerous. Emergency personnel will be busy trying to get to the calls they could not answer during the storm. You put them in more danger by being on the road.
  - It is highly likely that your workplace, children's schools and stores will be closed. Many roads and bridges are likely to be closed or blocked.
  - Emergency crews will be dispatched as soon as conditions are safe to begin clearing major roads of debris and open up routes to reach hospitals, fire stations, police stations and other critical facilities.
  - Be patient and stay home until it is safe to travel.
- Once officials say you can drive, you should still be very careful.**
- Traffic lights may still be out. Treat all intersections and locations where there is usually a traffic light as an all-way stop sign.
  - Roads may still be littered with debris.
  - Many routes may be flooded. NEVER drive through standing water. Remember: Turn around. Don't drown.

## Will I be able to get back home?



After an evacuation, many parts of Pinellas County may be inaccessible due to damage, flooding or debris blocking major roadways. Access into the county may be closed. Coming home immediately is not a guarantee.

- Stay tuned to social media and local news for updates on flooded areas, road closures and re-entry points before attempting to return to the county, your home or your business.
- Be prepared with proper ID that identifies you and the address of your residential or business property for re-entry after a storm.
- If you live or own a business on a barrier island, an Emergency Access Permit will make accessing the island after a mandatory evacuation faster and easier. You can get a permit from your City Hall and visit [www.pcsoweb.com/emergency-access-permit](http://www.pcsoweb.com/emergency-access-permit) for more information. If you do not have an Emergency Access Permit, you will be required to wait in line at the law enforcement checkpoint to show identification or other proof of residency, ownership, or employment every time you want to access the island.

## What is my responsibility during recovery?

**Be prepared to take care of yourself and each other for at least a week.** If a hurricane were to devastate the county, it could be a week before roads are opened and rescue workers can deliver water and basic food to the area. It could take weeks to restore basic services and for many grocery stores and other businesses to be able to open again. **In other words, you may be on your own for quite a while, and you should prepare for this. This is your responsibility.**

### Neighbors helping neighbors

From Texas to Puerto Rico to the Florida Keys, last year's hurricane season brought devastation to many areas. But the goodness of people was shown over and over, as neighbors helped each other through the worst of each storm and aided in recovery. Here in Pinellas County, after



Hurricane Irma passed, neighborhoods got together to share power and food. Community centers and faith communities answered the call to provide cooling stations, and others with power opened their doors to allow people to cool off and recharge their devices.

This is what will get us all through any disaster: working together.

## Will there be help after a hurricane?

### Disaster assistance

Following a disaster, organizations will come into the area to help. Check the county website for updates and listen to the news for announcements.

Disaster assistance is not meant to get people back to where they were before the storm. It is meant to get people through the disaster.

It is your responsibility to arrange for loans, insurance, contractors and the other items of business that you will need to get back on your feet. Get your business in order now and put your important documents together.

### FEMA

After a disaster, if a Presidential Disaster Declaration is issued, survivors must register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) if they feel they need help from any of the FEMA disaster assistance programs. Applicants will be asked to apply for a Small Business Administration Loan, even if they are not a small business. (See page 10)

- If the loan is approved, then a low-interest loan is available to help you pay for repairs.
- If the loan is not approved, then you are referred back to FEMA, who determines your eligibility for additional disaster help.

## Report price gouging

In a declared state of emergency, it is illegal to sell necessary goods or services at increased prices.

- Once you start purchasing gas and other items, and hiring contractors, be on the lookout. Make sure the professional you are hiring is a licensed contractor.

**If you believe a business or individual is price gouging, call Pinellas County Consumer Protection at (727) 464-6200 or report it to the Florida Attorney General's Office at (866) 966-7226 or through [www.myfloridalegal.com](http://www.myfloridalegal.com).**

## When will the debris be picked up?



Pinellas County (for unincorporated areas) and each municipality may have different procedures for debris pickup. That's why residents may receive different directions about dealing with yard debris, regular trash and bulk items.

- Normal daily schedules and processes will likely vary after a storm.
- The type of storm will also make the difference as to whether large items will be picked up, if yard debris will be in piles or bagged, etc. Be patient as urgent needs will be taken care of first.
- For information and instructions after the storm, check the website of your city or the county, follow them on social media or stay tuned to local news.
- Those who live on private roads may need to make additional plans for a location to dispose of debris.
- Contractors that you hire to do work such as cutting a tree down, fence work, flooding repair or removal of household items are responsible for debris removal. That is included in your fee so be sure that they are licensed and that they fulfill their responsibilities.



## How can I help?

There are new programs that give faith communities and other organizations the opportunity to help others in their time of need. By working with Emergency Management, interested groups can receive guidance on preparedness, disaster training and even become a shelter during a storm or afterward for displaced residents or emergency workers coming in from other areas. Preparation is key to success.

### Billboard Emergency Alert System (B.E.A.S.)



Private businesses and organizations often have large digital signs to advertise or tell people about community events. The B.E.A.S. program

invites sign operators to work with Emergency Management to share important information and alerts using their signs. If you own or manage a digital sign along any road in the county, you can be a part of saving lives in Pinellas County. Find out more at [www.pinellascounty.org/beas](http://www.pinellascounty.org/beas).

### Adopt-A-Shelter



The Adopt-A-Shelter Program is an opportunity for non-profit, faith-based or private organizations to offer shelter to those in need.

During dangerous weather, you may be able to open your facility as a shelter to your employees, congregations or the public. Or maybe your group would like to be trained and help at a public shelter. After the storm, there will be displaced residents and out-of-state rescue workers who need a place to stay. To talk about how you can help, call Emergency Management at (727) 464-3800.

### Faith-based communities



Faith-based congregations are in a unique position to help with disaster assistance. They have great resources, facilities and

talented, committed and skillful members. Most importantly, we trust our faith leaders to give us good information and advice that we can count on. Faith communities can help in many ways: hosting a speaker to educate members about personal preparedness; starting a host home program to help members find shelter; or offering your facility as a shelter to your members or the public, during or after a disaster. You can help with childcare, getting neighborhoods cleaned up and distributing information. To find out how you can get involved, call Emergency Management at (727) 464-3800.

## What should I do when I return home?



- Avoid downed lines; there is no way to tell if they are electrical and if they are still live. Be sure to report downed lines to the power company.
- Avoid flooded areas and standing water.
  - Water may be contaminated or electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
  - Flood waters can contain raw sewage, bacteria, viruses and other germs that can cause disease.
- Use caution in areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car.

- Do not enter a home that has major damage to the roof and/or walls. There is no way to know if it is safe.
- Watch for critters such as snakes, raccoons, opossums and insects that may have moved into your evacuated home, since they too look for shelter and relief from flood waters.
- Keep kids and pets with you. There could be dangerous conditions in the neighborhood, such as downed power lines, fallen trees and debris.
- Photograph and list all damaged or lost items including their age and value where possible. Take photos of water in the house. Adjusters need evidence of the damage to prepare your estimate.
- Contact your insurance agent before starting work.
- Remove wet contents immediately to prevent mold. Wet carpeting, furniture, bedding and other items holding moisture can develop mold within 24 to 48 hours. Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage

and chemicals. For information on cleaning up after a flood, go to [www.floodsafety.com/national/property/cleanup](http://www.floodsafety.com/national/property/cleanup)

- Get required permits before you start any home repair, improvement or construction.
- Hire a licensed contractor. Do not sign an Assignment of Benefits contract as a condition of having your home repaired.
- File your flood insurance claim as soon as possible.
- Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are serious health hazards.
- Take extra care to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in standing water and to protect yourself from bites. Use the 3 Ds: Drain water when possible; Dress in light colors and cover all parts of the body; and Defend with DEET, Picaridin or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus repellents.