5 STEPS to prepare for all hazards

In Pinellas County, we enjoy year-round sunshine and warm weather with abundant water surrounding us on three sides. But, living in paradise comes with its share of hazards.

Each year, from June 1 to Nov. 30, catastrophic hurricanes can develop within a matter of days with enough destructive wind and waves to put much of our peninsula underwater. During any season, severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, floods and other perils can strike any corner of our community.

Your county government works with municipal, state and federal partners to ensure residents and visitors are warned of life-threatening hazards; preparing for these dangers is everyone's responsibility. In daily life, we all rely on basic services such as electricity, running water and safe roadways to access food, medical care and other necessities. Imagine living for days or even weeks without these essentials as emergency crews work to clean up after a hurricane or other disaster.

The risk of these hazards should not make you fearful about what could happen to you or your family. With a few basic preparations, you can be ready to survive any peril that may arise.

The first section of this guide will take you through **5 Steps** for getting prepared for any type of hazard you may face here:

1. **CONNECT** to vital emergency information about dangerous weather and other hazards.
2. **BUILD** a survival kit with the things you'll need to survive without everyday necessities.
3. **ASSESS** your risk from storms and other perils or emergencies.
4. **PLAN** where you'll go and what you'll do in an emergency.
5. **RECOVER** after a disaster by taking safety precautions and requesting help.

The remaining sections of the guide offer advice to get ready for specific natural and man-made hazards.

On page 8, you'll find a **Family Disaster Plan**. After you've answered the questions in this plan, you should be ready to face most of the hazards we may encounter here in Pinellas County.

Share this guide with your family and neighbors as we work together to make Pinellas County a safe and resilient place to live, work and play. Free copies of the guide are available year-round at local government offices, libraries, community centers and online at ***www.pinellascounty.org/emergency***.

CONNECT to emergency information

in this section

- ***Sign up for Alert Pinellas***
- ***Weather alerts by radio or phone***
- ***What if you lose power?***

The single most important step you can take to get prepared is to know when a hazard is coming. You may expect to hear about a hurricane or other severe weather on the news, but what if a tornado unexpectedly strikes near your house and you only have a few minutes to act?

ALERTPinellas
Emergency Notification Service

ALERT PINELLAS

The *Alert Pinellas* emergency notification service allows Pinellas County to send urgent messages by voice or text to landlines, mobile devices and via email.

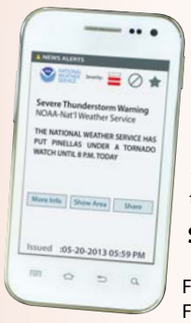
SIGN UP at ***www.pinellascounty.org/alertpinellas***. No internet access? Call **(866) 484-3264**.

FREE registration for multiple phone lines and devices. Register each address where you live and work to get alerts for multiple locations.

ADVISORIES may include severe weather, emergency road closures, boil water notices and other urgent messages.

ALERTS BY RADIO OR PHONE

NOAA Weather Alert Radio – A battery-operated radio that emits a loud alert signal when dangerous weather is in your area.



Wireless Emergency Alerts – Newer mobile devices are equipped for local, state and federal authorities to send alerts about dangerous weather and other emergencies. Check with your carrier. Visit ***www.ready.gov/alerts*** to learn more.

Social Media

Get emergency information on Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor. For details see page 15.

WHAT IF YOU LOSE POWER?

How to get emergency information when both power and cell service are down:

Battery-Operated Radio – Tune in to National Weather Service advisories.

Mobile Text Messaging – If your phone's digital clock works, you can send and receive texts.

Keeping Charged – Keep your phone charged and always keep spare batteries on hand for your radio, flashlight and other emergency items.

Emergency Updates – If the county's Emergency Operations Center is activated during a disaster, residents can find updates on the Emergency Management website, ***www.pinellascounty.org/emergency***, or call the Citizens Information Center at **(727) 464-4333** or **TDD (727) 464-3075**.

Knowledge is power.

BUILD a survival kit

in this section

- ***Survival kit checklist***
- ***If you must evacuate***
- ***Document checklist***
- ***Medications in emergencies***
- ***Special considerations***

Imagine life without power, water or safe roads to take you to the grocery store. Think through what you and your family members would need in a disaster to get by for an extended period of time. You don't have to be a "Doomsday Prepper" to build a basic survival supply kit.

A large plastic storage bin in your garage can hold most of the things you'll need.

SURVIVAL KIT CHECKLIST

Basic Necessities

- One-week supply of fluids to drink and non-perishable food that doesn't require cooking, e.g. dried fruit, canned tuna fish, peanut butter, etc.
- Water – at least 1 gallon of water per person per day for drinking/hygiene

- Non-electric can opener
- Medications and copies of prescriptions
- Paper plates, plastic cups and utensils
- Cooler with ice
- Utility knife
- Clothing/Bedding
- One change of clothes and shoes per person
- Rain gear
- Sturdy work shoes
- Blankets and sleeping bags
- Flashlight or lantern
- Battery-operated or hand-cranked radio
- Cell phone with charger, extra battery and solar charger
- Contacts in mobile device and in print for backup
- Extra batteries
- Matches or lighter in waterproof container
- Insect repellant
- Sunscreen
- Rope or elastic cord

- Whistle to signal for help
- Tools, including wrench to shut off water
- Map with shelter locations
- Paper and pencil
- Tarps
- Dust mask, plastic sheeting and duct tape to help filter contaminated air

Health and Sanitation

- First aid supplies – antibacterial hand gel, soap, over-the-counter pain reliever, anti-diarrhea medicine/laxative, anti-itch cream, antiseptic
- Sanitation – toilet paper, hygiene supplies, e.g. towelettes, feminine supplies
- Portable toilet – 5-gallon bucket with lid, trash bags, chlorine bleach
- Household chlorine bleach with medicine dropper to disinfect or treat water
- Do not use scented, color safe or bleach with added cleaners

Other

- Cash or travelers checks
- Books, cards, board games for entertainment
- Full tank of gas in vehicle

ASSESS your risks

in this section

- *Evacuation zones vs. flood zones*
- *Insurance*
- *Mobile homes are not safe havens*
- *Sandbags*

The highest point in Pinellas County is 110 feet above sea level, but much of our landscape on the coast and inland is vulnerable to flooding. It's estimated that **60 percent of the county's households may receive storm surge flooding in a major hurricane.** A storm-hardened home could withstand a Category 5 storm if it's located on high ground.

It's crucial to understand the specific risks your home faces from hazards such as flooding, storm surge and powerful winds and what you can do to protect yourself.

EVACUATION ZONES VS. FLOOD ZONES

EVACUATON ZONES	FLOOD ZONES
Wind-driven hurricane	Rising waters from heavy rain
Based on ground elevation and proximity to water	Based on flood risk over period of years for insurance purposes
Determined by the National Hurricane Center	Set by the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Interactive Maps:

Find your **Evacuation Zone** and **Flood Zone** at ***www.pinellascounty.org/flooding/maps.htm***.

INSURANCE

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What is my standard deductible?
2. What is my hurricane deductible?
3. Do I need flood insurance?
4. Do I have enough coverage to replace my home and belongings?
5. Do I have loss-of-use coverage for temporary housing expenses?

Not all insurance policies are created equal. Check your policy or talk to your agent to make sure you've got sufficient coverage and to determine if any home improvements would qualify for a discount on premiums. Information on insurance policies can be found through the Insurance Information Institute at ***www.iii.org***.

Flood Insurance

Homeowner Insurance policies **DO NOT** cover damage from rising flood waters. If you own a home in a flood zone, your mortgage company will require you to carry a separate flood policy. Even if you don't live in a flood zone, consider the additional coverage. Learn more about the National Flood Insurance Program at ***www.floodsmart.gov***. ***Remember:* a new policy takes 30 days to take effect.**

Home Hardening

Adding storm shutters, garage door braces and hurricane straps to the roof will make your home safer from wind damage and could lower your insurance costs. For more advice on home hardening, see page 14.

Renters

- Do I know my rental property's risk of flood or storm surge? Do I know my evacuation zone?
- Do I need flood insurance and renter's insurance to cover damage to my personal property?
- Will my landlord protect the windows in a storm? If not, where would I go during a hurricane?

MOBILE HOMES ARE NOT SAFE HAVENS

90 percent of mobile homes in Miami-Dade County were destroyed during Category 5 Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Even newly built manufactured homes are vulnerable to hurricane force winds or tornadoes. Any time Pinellas County is under threat of a hurricane, mobile home residents **MUST EVACUATE**.

Most mobile home park recreation centers are also not built to withstand high winds, so ask your park's management what plans they have for sheltering and evacuation notices.

Annual Maintenance

- Look for rusting of anchors and connections.
- Tighten the straps if necessary.
- Add anchors and straps where possible.
- Check for wood rot and termite damage at connections, joists and trusses.

SANDBAGS

Sandbags are made available by the county and municipalities for certain types of emergencies, such as localized flooding events. They are also available at local home improvement stores. Updates about sandbag availability will be provided during an emergency at ***www.pinellascounty.org/emergency***.

Note

Residents should not rely on sandbags to save their home from major flooding, especially fast-moving hurricane storm surge flooding. Consider the severity of flood conditions before deciding whether sandbags would be an effective means to protect your home. If properly used, sandbags can create an adequate barrier to keep slowly rising floodwaters out of your home during a heavy rain event. If flood levels are expected to be high, or the water is rising fast, it could take a substantial amount of sandbags to protect your property and this may not be a good option. During a direct hit from a hurricane, storm surge would be pushed ashore quickly at heights anywhere from 4 feet to more than 20 feet, which could easily overtake a sandbag barrier.

For more detailed information on the use of sandbags, see the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recommendations available online at ***www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/EmergencyOperations/Sandbaginformation***.

Survival kit *(continued)*

IF YOU MUST EVACUATE...

If you're staying in a public shelter, picture yourself sleeping every night in a room full of people in a space that only measures about 2.5 feet by 7 feet and pack accordingly. If you are evacuating to stay with friends or relatives in a host home, take a "go bag" and ask in advance what supplies you can bring and what kind of space you'll have for possessions and vehicles.

"Go Bag" Suggestions:

- Vital papers & ID
- Cash
- Phone number list
- Medications and copies of prescription paperwork
- Eyeglasses
- Non-perishable food/snacks
- Bedding
- Hygiene items
- Change of clothes, rain gear
- Kids' supplies and entertainment

Do I need to evacuate?
Find out on page 6.
Prepare your home:
See page 14 for details on how to prepare your home to evacuate.

DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

If you had to leave your home in a hurry, do you have backup copies of your personal documents? Are they stored in a safe place?

- Driver license or ID card
- Important numbers and emergency contacts
- Medical records – pharmacy prescription record, doctors, medications, dosages, blood type
- Insurance policy numbers – home, health, flood, auto, renters
- Household inventory for insurance claims – photo documentation stored on backup drive
- Other irreplaceable papers – e.g. birth, marriage, divorce, death and adoption certificates, passports, military records, wills, trust documents, titles to house or cars
- Account numbers for bank, credit cards, savings and investments

MEDICATIONS IN EMERGENCIES

Restrictions on refilling medications early are suspended by state law during hurricane warnings, when the Pinellas County Emergency Operations Center is activated or when the governor has declared a state of emergency. Make sure you get a refill immediately if you know a hurricane is coming.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

To find out what extra items you may need to pack, see the following sections:

Residents with Special Needs: Page 12
Pets: Page 13
Kids: Page 12

PLAN what you'll do

in this section

- *Who will you contact?*
- *Where will you go?*
- *How will you get there?*

During the chaos of an approaching storm, you may not have time to think through what you and your family members must do to get to a safe place together. While you can't plan for every possibility, it's important to answer **three questions** before a disaster…

1. WHO WILL I CONTACT?

- How would I reach my loved ones if my phone did not work in an emergency?
- Do I have important numbers written down and stored in a safe place?
- Has my family talked about how we would reconnect if an evacuation was called while we were separated?

2. WHERE WILL I GO?

- If there's a tornado warning in your area, have you identified a "safe room" in your home where you can hunker down?
- If you had to evacuate for a hurricane, would you try to drive out of town or to a friend's house in a safer area?
- In what situations would it be safe to stay home instead of trying to leave?

Find details about planning for specific emergencies in the **Hazards** section of this guide starting on page 9.

3. HOW WILL I GET THERE?

- If you have to leave your home in a hurry, is your car ready for a long trip?
- Do you have emergency supplies in your vehicle?
- Can you take public transportation to a shelter?

DRIVERS: Be aware that during a large-scale disaster, such as a hurricane, you may encounter heavy traffic on the limited routes out of Pinellas County. Fill up your gas tank and keep emergency supplies in your car.

BUS RIDERS: In an emergency, PSTA will run nearly all routes until it is no longer safe. **All rides are free during a hurricane evacuation.** Buses will also run from transfer stations to local shelters during an evacuation. Call the PSTA InfoLine at **(727) 540-1900**. Route information during a storm will also be posted at ***www.psta.net***.

NO TRANSPORTATION: The county offers transportation for special needs residents (see page 12). If you don't qualify and can't ride the bus, contact your local fire department or Emergency Management in advance for help. **Don't stay in a dangerous situation just because you don't have transportation!**

DISASTER PLAN

Fill out your own plan on page 8 of this guide.

RECOVER after an emergency

in this section

- *Utility outages*
- *Safe driving*
- *Getting help*
- *Price gouging*
- *Who to call*

When power and water goes out, numerous hazards can arise in your home, such as rotting food in the refrigerator, loss of safe drinking water and toilets that won't flush.

UTILITY OUTAGES

Power Outages

Electricity powers your lights, air conditioning, refrigerator and possibly even your stove.

Food Safety

TWO DAYS – The time frozen items can be stored safely if you keep the freezer door shut.

SIX HOURS – If the power is out for longer than this time, 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. For more food safety information, contact the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County at **(727) 824-6900** or ***www.pinellashealth.com***.

Generators

A gas-powered generator can keep your appliances going after a disaster, but it comes with **several dangers:**

- **CARBON MONOXIDE**: Use generators outdoors and away from windows and doors to avoid exposure to this deadly, colorless, odorless gas. **NEVER operate a generator indoors**.
- **FIRE:** Make sure the generator is cool when refilling the tank and store flammable fuel away from fuel-burning appliances.
- **ELECTRICAL SHOCK**: An electrical shock from your generator can also kill you.
  - Keep the generator in a dry place.
  - Plug appliances directly into the generator or use a heavy-duty, three-pronged extension cord.
  - NEVER plug the generator into a wall outlet; this can cause electrocution.

Water Outages

If the drinking water supply is compromised by a disaster, stay tuned for a boil water notice, which means there's a possibility of contamination.

BOIL - Bring a pot of water to a **rolling boil for 1 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**, but will work if there's no way to boil water. Bleach can also be used as a disinfectant by mixing - use nine parts water to one part bleach.

Sewer Outage

If a sewer outage is announced, **DO NOT flush your toilet**. Powered sewer lift stations may be down, which could cause a sewage back-up in your home.

Emergency toilets

Use a chemical toilet or create an emergency toilet by one of the following methods:

- **5-GAL BUCKET:** Line with heavy-duty trash bag and use household bleach as disinfectant. Make sure it has a tight lid.
- **TOILET BOWL**: Turn off your outside water supply first and flush once to empty before lining with a trash bag.

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 household commode. Thoroughly **sanitize** your emergency toilet with bleach before storing or disposal.

SAFE DRIVING

After a storm, roads may be littered with debris and many routes may be flooded. Avoid unnecessary travel and, if you must venture out, always obey "road closed" signs. **NEVER** drive through standing water. Treat any intersection with non-working traffic signals as an "all way" stop. Be prepared to stop at every intersection.

- **6** inches of water can sweep you off your feet
- **12** inches of water can float a car or small SUV
- **18** inches of water can carry away a large vehicle

GETTING HELP

Emergency crews will be dispatched as soon as conditions are safe to clear major roads of debris and open up routes to reach places that have been severely damaged. **Be patient and stay home if it's safe.**

Visit Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at ***www.cdc.gov*** for post-disaster health advice.

PRICE GOUGING

In a declared state of emergency, it is illegal to sell necessary goods or services at increased prices. If you believe a business or individual is price gouging, call Pinellas County Consumer Protection at **(727) 464-6200** to report it.

WHO TO CALL

9-1-1 for life-threatening emergencies

Citizen Information Center, **(727) 464-4333** or **TDD (727) 464-3075** – During and immediately after an emergency, county staff is available to answer residents' questions.

Duke Energy Outage Line, **(800) 228-8485** for power outages or downed power lines.

Pinellas County Utilities customers can call **(727) 464-4000,** or call your city's utility department for water or sewer issues or questions.

Public Works – Residents in unincorporated Pinellas County can call Public Works Operations at **(727) 464-8900**, or call your city's public works department.