

Been there, done that!...

Not your average guide to personal hurricane preparedness.

By Phil Molloy - Updated May 2008

Hurricane season is here. Purchase supplies that you need early! Don't wait for a storm. When a storm threatens, *lines will be long and supplies short (or non-existent).*

Hurricane preparation is important for your personal safety and comfort during and after a storm. Many of the listed items for purchase were, of course, gleaned from the many lists available to citizens. However, much of what you will see here (recommended purchase items and recommended actions) was developed from trial and error. More was developed from experience in the rescue and recovery efforts of several hurricane disaster areas to include Floyd, Hugo, Andrew, and Katrina. It's really ugly folks. Sometimes total devastation – "like a combat zone" as it has often been described after a destructive storm. The National Weather Service Hurricane Center has warned that storms will increase in frequency and intensity over the next two decades. Forewarned is for-armed. Don't be caught unprepared!

I use a category-4 hurricane as an example because it is the most powerful storm you could possibly hope to survive well in place. (Personally, I wouldn't stay in the area for more than a moderate category-3.) If the warning is for a category 5 storm – **EVACUATE. Do not expect to ride out a category-5 hurricane in safety. 911 services will not be available during the height of the storm and limited after. With the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina still fresh in our minds... well, you get the picture.

Imagine that a category 4 storm has caused major destruction to your town and your neighborhood. Most of your windows are out of your house and part of the roof is gone - just like most of your neighbors. You've survived the storm but, now that it's passed, power lines are down, roads are blocked and often unidentifiable and essential services are unavailable. The bugs and mosquitoes are horrendous, the snakes have come out of hiding, and the heat and humidity are sweltering. BUT, unlike your neighbors, you were prepared! You have a generator, plenty of water, food, tools and materials to secure your shelter, and lights and electric fans to make the hot, humid nights more tolerable. How did you know what to do before the storm and prepare for this day? Read on...

The list here is not all-inclusive but it's a good place to begin. You can customize it to meet your personal and family needs. Unless you make entirely too much money or you believe hurricane preparation is worth a large investment now and the bank's loan department likes you, start small and work your way up. It's all a matter of prioritizing.

Your focus should be preparation before the storm, survival and safety during the storm and survival, safety, and comfort after the storm.

If you have not been through a serious hurricane, don't do as many will and be lulled into a false sense of security. Don't think "we'll be okay just like always" or "we don't get the really bad storms in NC" or (here's the worst one) "I've been through one they said was bad but it was nothing". **Hint:** No major storm has hit our coast at high tide since Hazel in 1954. Hazel hit NC as a category 4 and was responsible for nearly 1200 deaths! I suspect we are long overdue. Ask anyone who has "been there, done that" and they will tell you the same thing.

Basic Hurricane kit

Assemble this now. Put items aside in a special box or have them identified to pull together to prepare for the storm. Keep heat-sensitive items inside the home and rotate stock as required throughout season.

- Flashlights and extra bulbs**
 - Clock (wind-up or battery-operated)**
 - Battery-operated radio** - a NOAA Weather Radio is inexpensive and a great addition to your kit
 - Battery-operated fan. These are available in most sporting goods departments (K-Mart, Wal-Mart, etc. Buy a couple – you won't regret it!
 - Toilet paper
 - Matches. Look in camping stores for waterproof matches or seal some in zip-lock bags.
 - Scissors
 - Plastic garbage bags – at least a box of 33gal size
 - A small battery-powered television to use when cable and power are lost**
- Working fire extinguishers - a 2-1/2lb and a 5lb. **Most house fires could have been contained if the resident had had these and knew how to use them.** Remember, a flood is bad; a tree in your roof is bad, losing power is bad, but a fire eats everything!
- A clean change of clothes, rain gear, sturdy work/swamp boots (Sneads Ferry Sneakers work well) that you would not mind throwing away. You don't want to be out wearing your flip-flops after the storm. As cool and comfortable as they might be, they won't protect your feet and severely damaged areas will be inundated with nails, trash, chemicals, snakes, and other critters.
- Battery-operated lanterns**. **Don't use candles and kerosene lanterns. They are fire hazards.** Don't scrimp on lighting. You may have experienced loss of power for a few, or even several hours in the past but imagine no lights for days or weeks! Battery powered items – especially lights – were at a premium in Florida for weeks after Hurricane Andrew.
 - Map of the area. You may know your area very well but trust me on this one. Hurricanes have a way of changing the landscape. And, oh, forget the street signs. There won't be any.
 - List of important phone numbers written on a couple of 3x5 cards.
 - Copy of insurance policy and other important papers

**Keep a good supply of spare batteries! It is *highly* recommended that you install fresh batteries in all battery-powered equipment before the start of the hurricane season. This is a small cost when related to the discomfort of losing battery power when you need it most because the batteries have leaked and destroyed your equipment. This also gives you the opportunity to check the proper operation of your equipment. Rotate your battery supply year round.

Emergency toilet (What goes in must come out!)

- A 5gal bucket with tight lid
- Plastic bags for liners
- Disinfectant or bleach
- Deodorizer
- Extra toilet paper

Baby needs

- Disposable diapers
- Wipes
- Diaper-rash ointment
- Baby medicines
- Medicine dropper
- Extra formula, baby food

Food supplies

Get enough nonperishable foods now for two weeks (but not less than three days). Then put them in a box and leave them alone. Note: Canned and other prepared foods that are salty or dry or high in fat or protein might make for good provisions but they'll make you thirsty. Write the date on all *packaged* food items with a permanent marker. Mark the date and contents of all *canned* goods (water/moisture may remove label). Write down a few simple meal recipes and match your supply to the menus. This will make it easier to know if you have the right items to meet your needs. Put a copy of the menu in with the food items as a reminder of your plan.

- Water: 2 quarts (small child) to 1 gallon (large child/adult) per person per day (have a week's supply); have extra for mixing powdered drinks
 - Ice or dry ice. CAUTION: understand how to handle/use dry ice before you buy any
 - Shelf-stable juice and milk
 - Canned and powdered milk
 - Beverages (powdered or canned, fruit juices, instant coffee, tea)
 - Raw vegetables that don't need refrigeration (will last only a few days)
 - Canned vegetables and fruits
 - Dried fruits
 - Prepared foods (canned soups, beef, spaghetti, tuna, chicken, ham, corned beef hash, packaged pudding)
 - Snacks (crackers, cookies, hard candy, unsalted nuts)
 - Snack spreads (peanut butter, cheese spreads, jelly)
 - Cereals
 - Sugar, salt, pepper
 - Bread
 - Dry and canned pet food (don't forget extra litter if you have cats)
- NOTE: Do you have sufficient coolers to handle your ice and perishables? Check now!

Kitchen supplies

- Waterless hand sanitizer
- Manual can opener/bottle opener
- Water purification tablets
- Matches in a plastic bag
- Pocketknife
- Camp stove or other cooking device and plenty of fuel. Use only canned fuel indoors - never charcoal or gas. Buy extra gas or charcoal for your grill to use in well-ventilated space after storm has passed.
- Ice chests or coolers
- Paper plates, napkins, plastic cups, plastic utensils, and plenty of paper towels.
- Disposable pans for cooking
- Plastic bags, jugs or containers for water and ice

Hardware

- Hand tools: hammer, nails, axe/hatchet, and shovel for after the storm – determine your own needs.
- Power screwdriver/drill to mount plywood over your windows. There are special clips available at hardware stores to use in place of screws or nails if you have a brick home.
- Sheets of ½" thick plywood to cover your windows. **Pre-cut** these to fit your windows and **mark them** for the window that each fits. Have a sufficient amount of 2" or 2½" all-purpose screws to secure to window frames. Pre-cut plywood does not take up much space in a garage or workshop. All of mine takes about 4'x4'x13" against a wall. Hint: drill three or four 1½" holes about one third of the way up the middle of each pre-cut window cover. This gives a tiny bit of light and allows you to see out in relative safety if you're staying in place during the storm.
- ¼ inch machine screw sockets (for your power drill) and screws
- Plastic sheeting to cover furniture. (See "other supplies" below)
- Rope – comes in handy if you have to move or secure something. Don't forget clothesline and some clothespins.
- Sturdy working gloves
- Duct tape to waterproof or secure items – masking tape isn't strong enough
- Tarps – shop around for these. You don't need the extra thick ones. The cheap ones will work just as well for quick repairs or covering items you need to protect. A couple of 8x10's and a 10x20 are good to start with. Build your supply each year.
- Nails. There are many kinds, so look over your home now and determine what you will need. A nail too small, the wrong shape or hammered in wrong will fail and that will give the storm the breach it needs to get into your home. Think about possible needs for these after the storm too. I recommend at least 1 box each of 1½" roofing, 10d, and 16d nails.

First-aid kit

Drugstores will be mobbed just before a storm and closed for days after. Keep a two-week supply of prescription drugs. Check with your doctor and pharmacist ahead of time to determine what you have to do to get these! Your first-aid kit should include:

Medical supplies

- First-aid handbook (take it out and read it now folks – NOT when you need it)
- Insect repellent sprays – pump bottles are best – have plenty on-hand because the insect population will be horrendous after the storm and if your home is damaged or you have to be outside, you will need lots of this. Insect repellent was in short supply after Hurricane Floyd. Follow the label instructions. Many repellents require application about every 3-4 hours. Use it correctly.
- Citronella candles – some people believe these work but I can't find any data that confirms this
- Insect bite lotion – the pain of a bite is the last thing you need to worry about
- Petroleum jelly, for relieving itching
- Ointments for burns, cuts
- Antiseptic solution
- Sunscreen
- Extra over-the-counter medicine (for colds, allergies, cough)
- Aspirin, acetaminophen, antacid tablets (you'll need these)
- Children's medicines
- Diarrhea control – **Pepto Bismol®** is always good to have
- Feminine hygiene items
- Rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide
- Iodine
- Disinfectant – keep a couple of cans on-hand. **Lysol®** works well.
- Soap in plastic bags
- Moist towelette packets

Other supplies

- Plastic sheeting – painters drop cloths work great. You can buy several large ones for a few dollars in the paint section at any hardware store. They come in small packages (get the 4-6mil thickness).
- Latex gloves or, better yet - dishwashing gloves.
- You can go all-out and buy a generator but know what you're getting into. Do you know how to use it? Will it be connected directly to your house to run everything or will you plug cords into it for your refrigerator, freezer, a couple of fans, and coffeemaker? Know how long it will run on a tank of fuel. It's my experience that most people with generators purchase only one or two gas containers. If you have no power for a week, you will quickly run out of fuel. Decide how long each day you will need to run your generator and plan your fuel accordingly. You can rotate gas into your car/truck/lawnmower throughout the season so it's always fresh.
- If you keep gas in your equipment or in containers for more than a couple months at a time, get a bottle or two of FUEL SAVER or FUEL FRESH – available in most hardware stores and department stores under various brand names like **Stabil®**. This will keep the gas from becoming useless or turning into varnish inside the engine's fuel system and damaging your equipment.

Purchase your supplies early because, after a destructive storm, NOTHING WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR DAYS OR WEEKS!

• Have a plan *and stick to it*. Write it down in a notebook while the pressure is off. Keep it in a place you won't forget.

Stay at home checklist:

- Remove all loose debris
- Empty and secure trash containers - keep one in the house/garage/on the deck and fill with water. If the storm aftermath is bad, you will know why I recommended this.
- Secure all windows (board or shutter). DO NOT TAPE YOUR WINDOWS! Taping serves no functional purpose whatsoever and is hard to remove.
- Prepare for loss or disruption of essential utilities
- Service your vehicle and ensure it has a full tank of gas
- Turn refrigerator to maximum cold and do not open unless necessary (use a cooler for items you expect to use frequently)
- Fill unbreakable containers with water and freeze - they can be left in place or later moved to the refrigerator or cooler
- Check your disaster supply stock (minimum 3-day supply)

Leave the area checklist (Bug-Out 101):

- Remove all loose debris
- Empty and secure trash containers
- Secure all windows (board or shutter – DO NOT TAPE)
- Service your vehicle and ensure it has a full tank of gas
- Shut off water/electricity/gas
- Lock house – board-up remaining doors – and advise a neighbor
- If you are going to a shelter or commercial lodging, plan for the care of your pets. Check for a veterinary clinic near your destination or check with area motels – most allow a couple of domestic pets. Your own veterinarian can help and will also give you the appropriate documentation – shot record, etc – for the other clinic (DO NOT LEAVE PETS BEHIND – if it's not safe for you, it's not safe for your pets!)
- Leave early - in daylight if possible. Have a 'decision timeline' – "if the storm is [this strong] and it's [this close to us], we will leave". Have a departure plan and stick to it. Once the decision is made, take action. Don't "second guess" your plan – execute it!
- Ensure someone knows your travel route and destination - preferably a family member from out of state
- Take small valuables and important papers
- If going to a shelter, have the following items: water, food, clothing, bedding, and special items (don't forget that battery powered fan I told you about!!). Pets are not normally allowed in shelters. However, some counties, like Onslow, do provide a special shelter for pet owners. Check with your local Office of Emergency Management – DO IT NOW
- If you are leaving with more than one vehicle (you and your spouse/other family member are each driving one), buy a couple of small "walkie talkies" which are available at most department store electronics or sporting goods sections. Traffic on the evacuation route will be terrible and you will be glad you can talk to one another. No, you will not be able to talk on your cell phone. During major evacuations, cell signal availability will be at a premium so DON'T COUNT ON IT! For you older folks – Baby Boomers like me – learn to text. Yes, I said it – learn. When cell service is sketchy and your voice calls keep getting dropped, texting will be much more reliable. If you're going to text old Uncle Lou, be sure he knows how!

If you can completely prepare your home and family for a hurricane in less than a day utilizing most of the items and preparation techniques I've mentioned, congratulations! You paid attention, built your supplies, planned well, and you are prepared!

Be Safe!

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