

Media Release



bluffton
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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Town of Bluffton Prepares for 2019 Hurricane Season

As a new Hurricane season begins, Town of Bluffton officials and staff members want residents and business owners to know how to prepare and how to partner with the Town to enhance hurricane preparation and recovery.

The past two years have tested and strengthened the Town's preparations, policies and procedures during these weather events. Town staff has prepared checklists below to further educate the public about the lessons learned, critical incident best practices and areas in which the Town needs further participation to mitigate any further damages and issues which hurricanes can bring.

Scott Chandler is Bluffton's emergency manager and a captain in the Bluffton Police Department.

"Until Hurricane Matthew in October 2016, Bluffton had not been affected by a hurricane in nearly 60 years," Chandler said. "In the past two years, Bluffton has confronted four named storms, with Hurricanes Matthew and Irma leaving property damage to our area. The more we communicate and the more we work together with every member of our community, we increase the probability of better weathering these events and reducing the probability of property and personal damage."

Town Manager Marc Orlando said Hurricanes Matthew, Irma, Florence and Michael have helped town staff refine and strengthen the town's response plans and procedures for all critical incidents, but especially with regard to hurricanes and other weather events.

"We plan our work and we work our plans," Orlando said. "However, our plans are only successful if we have the collaboration of our residents, property owners' associations and business owners. We are providing checklists to strengthen our response to storms and our relationships with these partners. We are in this together and we need everyone's cooperation to make these weather events as safe and uneventful as possible."

The checklists below detail several actions in which every resident can participate to help in the community's overall safety and recovery. One action crucial to reducing flooding opportunities is to check every outdoor pipe, ditch and storm drain to ensure there are no visible blockages.

"Every pipe, ditch and storm drain is a part of the stormwater infrastructure and each one needs a set of eyes on it," Watershed Management Division Manager Kim Jones said. "Any obstruction can cause a domino effect of flooding and that could result in damage to your house, your street or your property. Every resident is encouraged to help in this effort and ensure any ditch, pipe or drain near his or her property is clear of any obstruction."

Orlando said the past four storms have taught our community many lessons and he hopes these lessons and perspectives make each resident and collectively, the town, better prepared to face any future storms.

"The Town has fared well during the last two years of storms," Orlando said. "However, each storm has given us the opportunity to become more organized and effective in our community approach to any critical incident. We are in this together and I thank every resident who has helped in the past and takes the time to prepare for each storm we may face in the future."

Lessons Learned:

- **Ditches:** Town employees inspect and clean out stormwater ditches within the Town's control. However, numerous stormwater ditches are located on private property or in the jurisdiction of state or county roads. To ensure stormwater is able to flow unimpeded through the town's infrastructure, all stormwater ditches need to be maintained and regularly cleaned, especially prior to a storm. This ensures a continuous flow of water and prevents clogged areas from flooding.
- **Social Media:** During a hurricane, the town's emergency manager and town employees update the town's social media accounts frequently to ensure our residents are receiving the most recent, accurate information. Social media is a wonderful tool, however, especially during a hurricane, it is important to ensure information received is from a credible source. Please be mindful to check if the information you are sharing and/or believing is attributed to a reliable source such as state, county or local government agency.
- **Out of State Employers:** Hurricane Florence presented an unusual situation in which South Carolina was evacuated but Georgia was not. Many South Carolina residents, who work in Georgia, voiced they felt conflicted between their work obligations and their personal safety. While this situation is rare, it is best to know your plan and parameters with your employer prior to a storm.
- **South Carolina vs. Georgia Preparations:** Hurricane Florence also caused confusion about information sources. Due to the fact the Lowcountry region is within the Savannah media market, many people said they were confused since Beaufort County was being evacuated, but the Savannah, Georgia region was not. In this case, it is best to tune into your local and county government venues versus television stations. The Savannah area audience is the television station's primary audience. The Lowcountry audience is secondary. Therefore, local government agencies will have more complete and specific information for your situation.

How the Town Prepares:

- The Town hosts numerous public education hurricane preparedness seminars. The three sessions already held this season have been well-attended. There is one remaining, which will be held at Centro de Adoracion Torre Fuerte Church, located at 23 Boundary Street, Bluffton at 1:30 p.m., Sunday June 23. This seminar will be in Spanish. All are welcome to attend this free event.
- Requires all Town employees to attend a hurricane preparedness seminar and remind them to prepare now since about half of all Town employees are designated as emergency essential and are required to work throughout the storms.
- Coordinates with Beaufort County Emergency Management, Beaufort County School District and other local and regional agencies to refine hurricane procedures, assign specific tasks and participate in hurricane exercises. This is a year-around, continual process.
- Renews contractor agreements for debris removal and stock inventory of equipment and supplies so the Town is ready to activate at any time during the hurricane season.
- Checks all equipment, vehicles and prepares staging areas for equipment needed immediately after the storm.
- Checks all Town-maintained drains, inlets, ditches, roads for any blockage and cleans debris from these areas.
- Trims all dead or loose tree limbs from Town-owned properties and public parks.
- Emails all local contractors and property owners associations with hurricane preparedness checklists.

How Your POA Should Prepare:

- The Town emails Property Owners Associations (POA) at the beginning of each hurricane season and prior to a storm to remind property managers of the following:
 - Turn off any well water being pumped into man-made lakes and lagoons. This will allow water levels to decrease therefore, increasing their storage capacity.
 - Shut off any common area irrigation systems.
 - Inspect all storm drains for debris and blockages (i.e. pine needles, leaves, dirt, sediment or trash) and remove this material.
 - Inspect all pipe outfalls to ditches or ponds for blockages and remove any obstructions.
 - Confirm arrangements for debris/vegetation removal with a landscaping company or contractor.
 - Reduce/pump out water levels in lagoons, if possible.
- Please remember, most stormwater drainage infrastructure is privately owned and the maintenance of them are the responsibility of the POA.
- Trim dead, loose or overgrown trees and shrubs; these limbs can be potential flying debris.
- Communicate with neighborhood residents to trim dead, loose or overgrown limbs on their property.

How to Personally Prepare:

- The South Carolina Emergency Management Division Hurricane Guide has details about personal plans, zones, emergency shelters and links to other agencies and information. <https://scemd.org/stay-informed/publications/hurricane-guide/>
- Sign up to receive all of the Town of Bluffton's media releases and public notices: <https://www.townofbluffton.sc.gov/subscribe-to-our-mailing-list>
- Follow the Town of Bluffton and Bluffton Police Department on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You Tube.
- Use the Beaufort County Hurricane Hotline for updated information. The phone number is 1-800-963-5023. There is a specific mailbox for Bluffton updates and is available during a hurricane. This phone number is especially useful if you have evacuated.
- Remember the 5 P's: People (Pets), Prescriptions, Paper (i.e. Important documents), Personal Needs (i.e. medication, etc.), Priceless Items (i.e. pack your photos albums, etc.) and have a plan for each category.
- Make a paper record of all your contact information for your family and friends in case there is no cell phone service.
- Take photos of your property and home before and after the storm for insurance documentation.
- Secure any loose articles (i.e. outdoor furniture, potted plants or décor items) on your property that has the potential to become airborne and cause damage, or block pipes or ditches.
- Know your evacuations options and pre-plan possible routes and hotels or housing arrangements.
- If you own a pet, know which hotels accept pets during a hurricane.
- Have a supply of medications before you travel.
- Conduct inspections of drainage features around your house and property including gutters and remove any blockages.
- Turn off irrigation systems.
- Remove items which may hold water to deter mosquito breeding after the storm passes.
- Obtain flood insurance now. Most homeowner insurance policies do not cover flooding. The federal government administers flood insurance. More information is available at the National Flood Insurance Program at www.floodsmart.gov. It is predicted more than 75 % of Beaufort County will have the potential to flood with a Category 1 Hurricane. Please be mindful you live in the Lowcountry, therefore the entire region is flat and flood-prone.
- Best advice: Leave PRIOR to an evacuation order. You can better control your destination and route. Once an evacuation order is called, SC Highway Patrol officers and local officers will direct your path of travel which may add to frustration and increase travel time to your intended destination.
- Remember, if you decide to stay during an evacuation order, emergency services may be suspended due to unsafe weather conditions. Each resident who stays during an evacuation has to be prepared to address a health or safety situation alone.
- Please be patient and help your neighbor. The Town is working around the clock to manage the storm; however, everyone has a role in the community's safety and recovery.

How Developers/Contractors Prepare:

- The Town of Bluffton emails local contractors to remind them of the following:
 - Take preventative action to ensure all active construction sites are free of equipment, materials and debris.
 - All temporary fences and sediment and erosion control devices are properly installed and maintained to avoid dirt leaving site and roadway flooding is prevented.

Hurricane Season Reminders:

- The Hurricane Season begins June 1 and ends November 30. Historically, the Lowcountry has hurricanes or effects from hurricanes from late August through October.
- The Governor of South Carolina is the only one who can declare an evacuation order. Your local county and municipal officials are following the Governor's directive and may enact local measures to support and augment an evacuation order as needed to ensure public safety.
- Beaufort County Emergency Management (under the direction of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office) is the lead agency for all of Beaufort County. Its representatives decide re-entry routes and times. The Town of Bluffton follows the directives of Beaufort County Emergency Management during a hurricane or critical incident.
- There are NO shelters available in Beaufort County during a hurricane. The Red Cross has opened some shelters in Jasper County during storm events. Please call the local Red Cross for further information. Shelter information, when available, will be included in the town's updates to social media.
- If you need transportation to a shelter prior to a storm, please call the Palmetto Breeze, the Lowcountry's public transportation system at 843.757.5782.

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