DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Hurricane season is upon us, and, with 1,197 miles of coastline and all cities within 75 miles of the coast, there are no areas in Florida that are immune to the forces of a hurricane. Your safety and the safety of your family must be paramount as a hurricane strike becomes imminent, so it’s imperative that you have a plan and stay informed.

Have a Family Plan
In a major disaster, emergency workers may not be able to reach everyone right away and, in some cases, it may take three or more days for help to arrive. Having a plan for your family and their needs will help ensure their safety and comfort during these difficult times. The Florida Division of Emergency Management offers a Family Disaster Planning website to help Floridians create a customized family disaster plan. Floridadisaster.org/family allows each family to calculate the amount of food and water needed in the event of an emergency and gives supply checklists, provides local emergency contacts and evacuation routes. Each personalized plan also includes a checklist of things to do before, during and after a disaster.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides a Family Emergency Plan contact form at www.ready.gov/make-a-plan. This form will assist you in documenting essential information that you may need in case of an emergency. You will be better prepared to safely reunite with your family and loved ones during an emergency if you plan ahead and communicate with others in advance.

Have a Place to Go
If your plan includes evacuating to a safer location, determine where you will go in advance. If you are ordered to evacuate, don’t delay. Traffic congestion will only worsen as time goes on. Select the evacuation destination that is nearest to your home to minimize the distance you will have to travel. If possible, make arrangements to stay with a friend or relative who lives nearby, but will not be ordered to evacuate. Discuss the details of this plan with the friend or relative well before a hurricane is approaching.

Have a Pet Plan
All pet owners should have an emergency plan that includes an evacuation plan and adequate supplies for your pet in case of a disaster. Because many shelters cannot accommodate pets, be sure to find out in advance if the place you plan to go will welcome your pet, too. Keep in mind that shelters that allow pets require proof of license and vaccination and pets must be in an ‘airline approved’ pet carrier. Never leave your pets at home if you choose to evacuate. If it’s dangerous for you, it’s dangerous for your pet. For a list of pet friendly shelters in your area, contact your local emergency management department or visit www.floridapets.net/petfriendlyshelters.html. For a list of pet friendly hotels and motels, visit www.petswelcome.com. For guidance on creating a plan for large animals and livestock, visit the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ resources for disaster preparedness at www.freshfromflorida.com/ai/.

Stay Informed
FEMA now has the capability to deliver Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to your cellular phone, relaying Presidential, AMBER and Imminent Threat alerts. These WEAs use cell broadcast technology that will not get backlogged during times of emergency when wireless voice and data services are highly congested. WEA will not have to be opened like SMS text messages, but will “pop up” on your device’s screen. There is no charge to you to receive these messages. Customers of participating wireless carriers with WEA-capable phones will not need to sign up to receive the alerts and should automatically receive WEAs in the event of an emergency, if they are located in or travel to the affected geographic area. FEMA also offers additional information by request. Cell phone users can text SHELTER + your ZIP code to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelters in your area. You can also text PREPARE to 43362 (4FEMA) to sign up to receive monthly disaster safety tips.

For additional information, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at www.800helpfla.com or by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) within Florida, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español or (850) 410-3800 from outside of Florida.