

Riding it out... Should you stay or go?

FEMA

To make this decision, you should know as much as you can about the storm's strength and movement. Also, consider the safety of the location in which you'd be "riding it out." Obviously you're better off in a sturdy inland structure on high ground than in a beach cottage or a mobile home in a low-lying area.

There are many other factors involved, and there is no one answer for every situation. Monitor Internet, TV and radio for the latest reports, and err on the side of caution.

If authorities order an evacuation, follow their instructions!

Take the threat of a hurricane seriously. Hampton Roads has not been directly hit by a major hurricane since 1933, and it's only a matter of time before we experience another of these killer storms. Property damage is unavoidable, but loss of life can be avoided if people heed warnings from authorities. Here's what to watch for:

HURRICANE WATCH

A Hurricane Watch is issued by the National Hurricane Center when hurricane conditions pose a threat to a specified area within 36 hours. Before the official evacuation order is given, consider leaving the area early to avoid congested evacuation routes.

- Monitor Internet, radio, or television for hurricane progress reports.
- Check emergency supplies.
- Fuel car.
- Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys, and garden tools and anchor objects that cannot be brought inside.
- Secure buildings by closing and boarding up windows. Remove outside antennas.
- Turn refrigerator and freezer to coldest settings. Open only when absolutely necessary and close quickly.
- Store drinking water in clean bathtubs, jugs, bottles, and cooking utensils.
- Review evacuation plan.
- Moor boat securely or move it to a designated safe place. Use rope or chain to secure boat to trailer. Use tiedowns to anchor trailer to the ground or house.

HURRICANE WARNING

A Hurricane Warning is issued by the National Hurricane Center for areas where sustained winds of 74 mph or higher are expected within 24 hours or less. All precautions must be completed immediately.

- Constantly monitor Internet, radio, and TV for official instructions. Have a battery powered radio ready.
- If in a mobile home, check tie-downs and evacuate immediately.
- Store valuables and personal papers in a waterproof container on the highest level of your home.
- Avoid elevators.

A WORD ABOUT STRIKE PROBABILITIES

As a hurricane approaches, you may hear reports or see maps on TV giving "strike probabilities." These show the most likely areas to be hit with the highest percentage, and areas less likely to be hit with lower percentages.

Do not be lulled into a sense of security if Hampton Roads has a low strike probability. These numbers represent the forecasters' best guess as to where the hurricane is headed. Hurricane movement is very hard to predict and storms can and do change course unexpectedly.

Also, we're used to hearing percentages for the probability of precipitation. While you may go ahead with your plans for a picnic if there's a 60% chance of rain, you should not use that mindset with hurricanes. The consequences of the forecast being "a little off" are drastically different for rain and hurricanes.

IF YOU STAY

- Stay indoors in an inner room on lowest level away from doors and windows.
- Do not go out in the brief calm during passage of the hurricane's eye. The lull sometimes ends suddenly and winds return from the opposite direction. Winds can increase in seconds to 75 mph or more.
- Without taking any unnecessary risks, protect your property from damage. Temporary repairs may reduce further losses from wind and water.
- Move furniture away from exposed doors and windows.
- Keep radio or television tuned to receive information from official sources. Unexpected changes can sometimes call for last minute relocations.
- Remain calm. Your ability to cope with emergencies will help other members of your family. Stay calm, be reassuring, and use common sense.
- Use telephone or cellular phones only in the event of an emergency or a life-threatening situation.

IF YOU EVACUATE

- Know the official evacuation routes and where you are going, leave early (preferably at the beginning of the watch period) leaving sufficient time to avoid heavy evacuation traffic. Evacuate in daylight with a full tank of gas.
- Take only the most valuable possessions with you, otherwise place them in high points away from flooding within your home.
- Listen to your car radio for additional emergency information or evacuation routing problems.

- Turn off gas, water and electricity. Check to see that you have done everything you can to protect your property from damage or loss.
- When going to an evacuation shelter, first confirm that the shelter is open. During an emergency, authorities open shelters as they are needed. Take blankets, sleeping bags, flashlights, special dietary foods, infant needs, games, lightweight folding chairs and water. Register every person arriving with you at the shelter.
- Do not take pets, alcoholic beverages or weapons of any kind to the shelters. Be prepared to offer assistance to shelter workers if necessary, and advise all family members of their obligations to keep the shelter clean and orderly.
- You should have pre-planned what to take within your vehicle (blankets, bottled water, canned or dried provisions, eating utensils, extra family medications, first aid kit, games, hearing aid, manual can opener, prescriptions, sleeping bags, spare batteries, spare glasses and other essential survival items). Take additional changes of clothing and foul weather gear.
- You should have preplanned to keep in your possession your driver's license, personal identification papers, insurance policies, personal property inventory, medic-alert or device with special medical information, maps to destination, heirlooms, valuable pictures and essential paperwork that may be vital during and after your evacuation.
- Take cash, since ATM's or credit card machines may not be working.