



Consumer Bulletin

E. Leon Jacobs, Jr., Chairman

Hurricane Season Is Here - Are You Prepared?



Hurricane season is here, and it's predicted to be a busy one. June 1 marked the beginning of Florida's hurricane season, and until November 30 you should pay special attention to weather forecasts in your area.



While storms rated as category 5, with winds of 155 miles per hour or more can be the most dangerous, tropical storms with winds of 74 miles per hour or less can be just as deadly.

Weather experts and emergency planners have been stressing for many years that the most dangerous storm is the one you are in at the time. At the very least, failure to take any storm seriously can cause a major inconvenience, but it could just as easily cost you or those around you their lives.

To prepare, the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) recommends you use the following storm preparation checklist as a guide:

- ✓ Call your electric, gas and phone companies in case of outages during or after the storm. These companies have disaster response plans in place which are designed to restore services in an expeditious manner, without compromising safety. You may also contact the PSC at **1-800-342-3552** if you have problems after contacting your utility. You may also contact us by e-mail at **contact@psc.state.fl.us**, or visit our Internet home page at **http://www.floridapsc.com**.
- ✓ Also visit the Disaster Preparation Web site of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) at **www.florida.disaster.org**. DCA responds to natural disasters and works to keep Florida's consumers safe, water and air pure and coastal areas and beaches protected.
- ✓ Make sure that all family members know how to respond before, during and after a hurricane. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person.
- ✓ Get cash if you need to. ATMs may very likely be shut down by a storm.
- ✓ Develop an emergency communications plan. Listen to the weather forecast for your area and always observe the advisories and warnings. In case you or other family members are separated from one another during a disaster, have a plan for getting back together. Please adhere to evacuation directions promptly.
- ✓ Keep a list of emergency phone numbers for police, fire, utilities and ambulance. Teach your children how and when to call 9-1-1, the police or fire department and which radio or television station to tune to for emergency information.
- ✓ Call the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) before a hurricane and request copies of its hurricane program publications. FEMA has several brochures with information and tips to prepare you and your family for the occurrence of a hurricane. You may contact FEMA at **1-800-480-2520**.
- ✓ Keep a working radio, flashlights, extra batteries, candles and oil lamps. Check occasionally to ensure that they are in working order.
- ✓ As a precautionary matter when storms approach, turn your refrigerator and freezer to their coldest settings. Open them only when absolutely necessary and close them quickly. Return to normal settings when the threat of power outages has passed.
- ✓ If a storm approaches, store drinking water in clean bottles, jugs and even the bathtub, as needed.
- ✓ Make safety your first concern: consider all downed power lines energized and call your electric company immediately.
- ✓ Stay away from flooded areas and debris, as they could conceal downed power lines; Refrain from driving around in damaged areas, as you could hinder rescue and/or restoration efforts and jeopardize your safety.
- ✓ If you're using a generator, run it outside in a well ventilated area and connect your appliances directly to it. Do not wire your generator directly to your breaker fuse box, as it may backfeed on power lines and cause injuries.
- ✓ Don't cook with a charcoal or gas grill inside the house; If you leave your home, be aware of appliances that may have been on when the power went out, or turn off your main breaker.
- ✓ If you have any doubt about your home electrical system or are unsure of how to proceed, call a licensed electrician.

E. Leon Jacobs, Jr. is the Chairman of the Florida Public Service Commission. The PSC sets the rates utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately-owned.