

Charlotte County update for 4/14/21

Now is the time to begin hurricane season preparations

By Hector Flores

Recent preliminary forecasts for the upcoming hurricane season make this a good time to discuss how to prepare to keep yourself, your family and your property safe.

Forecasters from Colorado State University, a widely respected tropical weather research institution, are forecasting 17 named storms, eight hurricanes and four major hurricanes this season. The weather forecasting vendor we consult with predicts 19 named storms, nine hurricanes and five major hurricanes.

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center this week updated its definition of what constitutes an "average" hurricane season. The CPC now considers an average season to be 14 named storms and seven hurricanes based on the 30-year averages between 1991 and 2020. The previous averages based on the 30-year period between 1981 and 2010 were 12 named storms and six hurricanes. Both periods saw an average of three major hurricanes.

Last hurricane season was the most active on record, with 30 named storms and 13 hurricanes, of which six intensified into major hurricanes (categories 3-5 on the Saffir-Simpson scale). There were so many storms, the National Hurricane Center had to use nine letters of the Greek alphabet — Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta and Iota — to identify them.

The hurricane season officially begins on June 1 and runs through November 30, but the weather doesn't read a calendar. Last year, two tropical storms formed before the "season" started, including one that formed May 16. The NHC will now begin routine issuance of its Atlantic Tropical Weather Outlook on May 15. Early season storms tend to form in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean or western Atlantic Ocean, giving us less time to react and prepare for impacts.

All this background is to underscore that now is the time to prepare yourself and your family for hurricane season. In the coming weeks you will begin to see information from our Office of Emergency Management in the media, on social media and via emergency messaging systems about pre-season actions you can take.

Here are the basics. Know your zone. When evacuations are ordered is *not* the time to find out if you're in an orange or red zone. Visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and enter Know Your Zone in the search field.

Think ahead about evacuating. Seeking shelter in a county-run shelter should not be anyone's Plan A. There's plenty of time now to make alternative plans, such as sheltering with family and friends outside the impacted area. The ongoing pandemic may also mean there will be less room at county refuges, so they may fill up faster than normal.

Check your records, including insurance policies, medical prescriptions and phone contacts.

For more detailed planning tips, visit Ready.gov or FloridaDisaster.org.

To receive emergency phone messages, texts or emails, sign up for AlertCharlotte at www.AlertCharlotte.com.

Long-time residents of Charlotte County are well-versed in hurricane preparation and we appreciate them embracing the culture of preparedness we have tried to instill. If you are new to the area, please take the steps above. If you have new neighbors, educate them how we get ready here.

The forecasts may look daunting, but remember it only takes one of those predicted storms to make landfall here to cause problems. Here's hoping we stay out of the cones and if we don't that you and your family are ready and stay safe.

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