

Preparedness a priority as hurricane season nears

By Patrick Fuller

Half of each year is hurricane season and though that means little in some places in this country, Floridians know it is the time of year we may be faced with weather events so disruptive and damaging they can change our community for years to come. Hurricane Charley in 2004 was the last hurricane that brought major impacts to Charlotte County.

Those like me who grew up here or have lived here for a number of years can tell you how different portions of this community are as a direct result of that storm. Since 2004 we have had several close calls with tropical storms and hurricanes with varying levels of impacts. The most significant threat to our area since Charley, Hurricane Irma, shifted eastward as it traveled north through the peninsula, sparing Charlotte County from extensive damage. As new residents move to our area and as time passes since Charley left its mark on Charlotte County, it is important to remain focused on preparedness. Seasonal outlooks are once again calling for an above average year of hurricane activity. It is important that residents use their time now to prepare for what could be a busy season.

Building a disaster kit complete with the supplies you will need to get by on your own for five to seven days is a good first step when tackling the task of preparing for hurricane season. Disaster kits should include non-perishable food, water (one gallon per person per day), medications (two weeks supply), clothes, flashlights, batteries, cash, first aid kits, battery- or crank-operated radios and important documents. And don't forget the needs of your pets. A comprehensive listing of disaster supply kit considerations can be found in the Charlotte County Disaster Guide, available at all Charlotte County libraries and online at the Charlotte County Emergency Management website (www.charlottecountyfl.gov/EM). Disaster kits are there to sustain you and your family in the days after an event.

Developing your disaster plan is another important step in preparing for hurricane season. In your plan you should address where you will go if directed to evacuate. Shelters should be your last option. The plan should include how you will communicate with loved ones, what you need to do to prepare your home in advance of a storm and how you will stay informed before, during and after storms. Great sources of information include local television, radio and print media, official government websites and social media accounts. The fastest way we can get emergency information like evacuation notices, directly to you is Alert Charlotte, a free service available by registering at www.charlottecountyfl.gov/alertcharlotte.

Understanding your specific level of risk helps you to make informed decisions. Knowing your evacuation zone ahead of time is critical to understanding evacuation orders from local government. In Charlotte County you can find your evacuation zone by going to www.charlottecountyfl.gov/knowyourzone. You should also be familiar with your home. Keep in mind site-built homes fare much better in wind events than do mobile or manufactured homes. A sometimes overlooked, though vitally important, planning factor are the special considerations of the individuals within your household. These considerations can include things such as mobility challenges, young children, medical conditions and dietary limitations. Thorough planning ahead of a storm helps to reduce stress and gives you and your family the ability act quickly to ensure your safety.

As we foster a culture of preparedness, we hope new residents unfamiliar with tropical weather, along with those that have lived here for numerous hurricane seasons, embrace the responsibility of being ready.

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