

Charlotte County update for 5/13/20

Public health drives decisions on reopenings

By Hector Flores, Charlotte County Administrator

As Charlotte County moves forward under Gov. DeSantis' reopening guidelines, we continue to evaluate which facilities, parks and services should be opened. In every decision, the health and well-being of the public and our employees is the primary consideration.

On Tuesday, our mini-transfer and recycling facilities reopened with procedures in place to limit interaction between staff and residents. Also on Tuesday, the County Commission discussed what measures could be put into place to open county pools safely. Many community pools operated by homeowners' association or condominium boards have been following the county's lead on closures, so we know our decision will have a domino effect in the private sector. With any reopenings, we urge decision-makers to operate in a safe manner.

Staff presented a comprehensive plan to do so based on Centers for Disease Control, Florida Department of Health and trade association guidance on best practices. Pools will remain closed for now, but we will continue to assess and will recommend opening when it is safe to do so.

When we do open pools and other amenities, those same best practices will be our touchstone. Distancing between people. Disinfecting surfaces. Practicing good hygiene before and after visiting a facility. Using recommended personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves.

As a community, we have endured disasters like Hurricane Charley with a spirit of kindness and resilience. With the coronavirus, it's a more nebulous opponent and people's views of it are colored by many factors. I tell our employees the way we handle ourselves in this crisis will be with mutual respect for others' decisions and circumstances and basic kindness. The people we serve deserve that from their government and the response has been heartening. Dozens of employees have staffed food distribution centers, handing out meals to residents. Others are steering callers to needed assistance for rent, car payments or applying for food stamps. Still more are handling the staging and distribution of critical personal safety equipment.

Here, as in other communities across the nation, local government employees are tackling new tasks in response to the pandemic, but many more are doing the same work they performed before the crisis. Critical infrastructure work, such as emergency response, water and wastewater treatment, is often taken for granted, even in normal times. Then there's traffic and road maintenance, accounting and purchasing functions, facilities construction, human resources and communications. I'm so proud of how the team has responded, even as they face the same challenges as the people they serve: children at home, relatives at risk or sick from the virus, underlying conditions that make them vulnerable, scary symptoms that may or may not be from COVID-19 and the daily uncertainty of what's to come.

I hope you're staying safe and healthy and any challenges you're facing from the economic impacts of the pandemic will begin to ease as we launch our recovery.

Hurricane prep

This time of year, our emergency management staff is typically performing outreach, attending expos and providing neighborhood presentations about the importance of hurricane preparedness. Circumstances this year rule out mass gatherings to educate people about developing a family disaster plan, knowing your evacuation zone and stocking up on supplies.

One thing we want to stress this hurricane season, which forecasts predict will unusually active, is planning for how you will respond if we're under a storm threat. We always say going to a shelter should never be a first option. Given the distancing and disinfecting requirements due to the pandemic, that is even more important than ever. Shelters will fill up much faster in the event of a storm due to lower capacities.

Here's a few things you can do if you don't already have a plan in place. Find your evacuation zone. Visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click Know Your Zone under Popular Links. Check what year your home was built. Homes built after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 are better equipped to withstand tropical winds. Visit www.ccappraiser.com, click Record Search and enter your home address. Stay informed if a storm approaches and watch for evacuation orders or shelter at home orders. Coastal areas, homes along waterways and mobile homes are the first to be ordered to leave if tidal surge dictates. The mantra is hide from wind, run from water.

Keep an eye out for our new hurricane guide, which will be available in print and online editions. It will feature evacuation zones and routes, tips for safe sheltering-in-place and a pet disaster care checklist. If you want to develop a disaster plan or revise an existing one right now, visit ready.gov and click Make A Plan.

Stay safe and be well.

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