

Be prepared for approaching hurricane season

By Patrick Fuller

For many of us, the approaching 2025 Atlantic Hurricane Season will be one of many we've experienced while living in Florida. At the same time, a growing number of new residents will be facing hurricane season for the very first time. Regardless of how long you've lived here, preparedness should remain a top priority. Charlotte County has faced hurricanes bringing destructive winds and heavy rainfall, but 2024 marked the first time in recent memory that significant storm surge affected our community. The damage caused by hurricanes Helene and Milton was severe, but it could have been even worse. That possibility is sobering, especially given our county's history with seven presidential disaster declarations in just the past eight years alone. While our beautiful weather, coastline, and lifestyle draw people to Charlotte County, those same features come with risks. Building a culture of preparedness and enhancing our resilience is how we continue to enjoy life in Southwest Florida.

The first step in preparing for hurricane season, which begins June 1, is understanding your risk. Start by determining your evacuation zone by going to www.charlottecountyfl.gov/knowyourzone. If evacuations are called, they will be communicated by these zones. Additionally, assess the structural integrity of your home. Homes constructed prior to improvements to the Florida Building Code in the mid-1990s may not be as resistant to hurricane-force winds. Mobile and manufactured homes are not as resilient to damaging winds as site-built homes. Also consider your home's elevation and its vulnerability to flooding and remember a Flood Zone and a Storm Surge Evacuation Zone are two different things.

Next, develop a personalized emergency plan. Identify a safe location where you can go if evacuation becomes necessary, such as a friend's home outside the risk zone, a hotel, or a public shelter. Make a checklist for securing your home: installing hurricane shutters, securing loose outdoor items, and knowing how to shut off utilities. Plan what you'll take with you, including important documents, medications, clothing, and pet care items.

Prepare a disaster supply kit with essentials to last five to seven days. Include non-perishable food, bottled water, flashlights, batteries, a first aid kit, personal hygiene items, pet supplies and backup chargers. A comprehensive checklist of disaster supplies is available in the Charlotte County Disaster Guide.

Finally, stay informed. Sign up for Alert Charlotte, our free emergency notification system, at AlertCharlotte.com. Tune in to local news outlets, and follow Charlotte County's social media for accurate and timely updates throughout hurricane season. Connectivity and power are often impacted after storms, preventing us from using cell phones, televisions or the internet. Make sure a battery or crank powered radio is part of your disaster kit. Additionally, information hubs with printed materials listing available resources will be placed in impacted areas of the county.

As Charlotte County continues to grow at a rapid pace, we as a community must continue to do what is necessary to remain resilient in the face of future disasters. The cumulative effect of

repeated impacts takes a toll on all of us, though it is important not to let your guard down. Preparing our families, our homes and our businesses is critical every hurricane season. Resources are available to help you prepare. The Charlotte County Disaster Guide is available at <https://www.charlottecountyfl.gov/departments/public-safety/emergency-management/> and printed copies are available at Charlotte County libraries. By embracing a culture of preparedness, we can be ready next time we are visited by topical weather, and our community will do what it has done time again, rise to the occasion and come out stronger.

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