

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

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Sussex County emergency officials stress preparation as 2019 hurricane season gets underway

Forecasters predict 'near-normal' storm season, just days after first tropical system forms off southeastern U.S. coast

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

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June is the season of commencements, from graduations to wedded bliss. But it also marks another beginning, one more ominous: the start of the Atlantic hurricane season. Still, just like taking those first steps into a new phase of life, be it as a graduate or as a newlywed, the start of hurricane season serves as a reminder that preparedness for the challenges ahead is a must to help ensure success.

As the six-month-long season officially gets underway June 1, the Sussex County Emergency Operations Center is stressing to the public the need to be ready ahead of the forecast. Preparation is critical to limiting damage and avoiding loss of life.

“Whether it’s a season of six or sixteen storms, minor or major systems, the same message applies: be ready,” Sussex County EOC Director Joseph L. Thomas said. “The recent tornadoes here in Sussex County were a prime example of how even an isolated incident, such as a thunderstorm, can cause devastation and disruption. We cannot stop Mother Nature, but we can certainly put up our best defense.”

Like other coastal communities from the Caribbean to Canada, Sussex County is susceptible to the effects of tropical weather, from flooding to high winds.

The 2018 hurricane season was above average in the Atlantic, with 15 named storms during the season, including eight hurricanes, two of which were major and wrought billions of dollars in damage – Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas, and the since-reclassified Category 5 Hurricane Michael in the Florida Panhandle. Sussex County suffered no ill effects from tropical weather, but the lack of storm activity here is no reason to rest easy now, Mr. Thomas said. “I say it every season: all it takes is one. That’s why it’s essential for everyone to be prepared,” he said.

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For the 2019 Atlantic hurricane season, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting a near-normal season, with nine to 15 named systems possible. Of those, four to eight could become hurricanes, with up to four possibly reaching Category 3 strength or higher, according to NOAA's May 23 forecast. Forecasters expect warmer-than-normal sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic and a weak El Niño weather pattern – the warming of waters in the Pacific Ocean off South America – to shape the 2019 season. The El Niño pattern, when present, causes wind shearing in the Caribbean and Atlantic that often thwarts the development of tropical systems in the Atlantic basin. However, without a strong El Niño, and water temperatures at or above normal in the Atlantic, conditions in the Atlantic basin can be more favorable for tropical development.

An average Atlantic hurricane season sees 12 named storms, including six hurricanes, with three classified as major. Already, 2019 is off and running with the formation of Subtropical Storm Andrea just this week. Mr. Thomas emphasized whatever 2019 holds, just one storm can destroy homes and take lives.

One step residents can take ahead of hurricane season is to create a Safety Profile for their household with the County's free Smart911.com service to provide potentially critical, life-saving information up front to first responders. Profiles can contain as much or as little information as users want, including details about their properties, special medical conditions and family contacts.

To help make the storm season safer for everyone, there are several steps you can take to make your home and family ready for hurricane season:

- If you live in a flood-prone or other vulnerable area, be prepared to evacuate. Plan your evacuation route now. Emergency managers will notify the public, via the media, of what areas should evacuate and when. In the event you evacuate, take a storm kit. Take valuable and/or important papers. Secure your house by locking the windows and doors. Turn off all utilities (gas, water, electric, etc.). Notify a family member or someone close to you outside the evacuation area of your destination.
- Secure all outdoor items. Property owners also will need to secure their boats. Area residents should clear rainspouts and gutters and trim any trees that may pose a problem during high winds.
- Have a family disaster kit. This kit should include the following items:
 - A three-day supply of water. This should include at least one gallon of water per person per day;
 - Non-perishable foods and a manual can opener;
 - A change of clothes and shoes for each person;
 - Prescription medicines;
 - A blanket or sleeping bag and pillow for each person;
 - Personal hygiene items;
 - A flashlight and extra batteries for each person;

- Special needs items, such as formula and diapers for infants, as well as items needed for elderly or disabled family members;
 - A portable radio with extra batteries;
 - Money. During power outages, ATMs will not work;
 - Fuel. Gas pumps are also affected by power outages, so it is a good idea to have fuel in advance.
- In the event of an approaching storm, travel during daylight hours. Do not wait until the last minute to make plans or to purchase gasoline and supplies. When a storm watch is issued, you should monitor the storm on the radio and television. An evacuation could take 24 to 36 hours prior to a storm's onset.
- If ordered to evacuate and seek shelter elsewhere, follow the instructions of local emergency managers on where to go and when. Authorities will announce shelter locations in advance of their opening. Make provisions for your pets, as many shelters will not accept animals.
- If not ordered to evacuate and you decide to take shelter in your home, have your disaster kit ready. Keep your important papers with you or store them in the highest, safest place in your home, and in a waterproof container. Even if you seek shelter in place, you need to secure your home by locking the doors and windows. Turn off all utilities (gas, water, electric, etc.). Monitor the storm by portable radio to keep up with the latest information. Stay indoors. Try to stay in an inside room away from doors and windows.
- Use your phone sparingly. Make only essential calls and keep the calls brief. Report emergencies to 911. When reporting emergencies, identify yourself and your location, making sure to speak clearly and calmly. If you have a mobile telephone, make sure it is charged and ready to use at all times. Remember, however, that cell service may be interrupted during and after the storm.

Hurricanes and tropical storms can have devastating effects. In the event a hurricane affects our area, expect polluted water, limited communications, no electricity, overflowing or backed-up sewers, undermined foundations, beach erosion and heavy damage to homes and roadways.

Do not re-enter the area until recommended to do so by local authorities. As you re-enter the area, be aware of possible hazards such as downed trees and power lines. Be aware of debris and water on roadways. Upon re-entry, have identification and important legal papers ready to show officials proof of residency. Continue to use your emergency water supply or boil water until notified that the drinking water is safe. Take precautions to prevent fires.

For more information on preparing for hurricane season, including evacuation maps and preparedness brochures, visit Sussex County's hurricane homepage at www.sussexcountyde.gov/hurricane-information, or the NOAA Weather Ready Nation homepage at www.weather.gov/wrn/.

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