



HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

As I write this newsletter, it is raining, and it is a welcome relief from the scorching summer heat. Even those who like Florida summers have found it to be a difficult season. Around the world we are seeing earthquakes, volcanoes erupting that have been dormant for centuries, unprecedented flooding in some regions and forest fires. Our earth is changing, as it has throughout history, and we are living through this groaning.

Northwest Florida occasionally gets the full force of a Hurricane e.g. Michael, Erin, Opal and the 1935 direct hit to our area. Each of us bears a personal responsibility to be ready for such a catastrophic event. Hopefully you have the list for your preparedness kit, from nonperishable food to batteries, that will sustain you for at least the first 72 hours, three days.

We are now in the peak 6 month window, when anxious eyes turn to the tropics and we try to decipher potential local tropical impacts, known as the Cape Verde Season. Most of us have been through this exercise many times before, but for our newer Okaloosa County citizens, as well as the seasoned ones, let's review our plans.

Develop an evacuation plan, assemble disaster supplies, review Home-Owners and Flood Insurance policies. Harden your home with hurricane straps on your roof, hurricane impact garage doors and windows, install shutters or fitted plywood, and complete a written plan of action. Walk through your home and take a video of each room on your cell phone to provide evidence of loss to your insurance companies. Evaluate trees on your property with an eye to potential damage.

Some useful websites:

Floridadisaster.org (Disaster Supply Kit Checklist, Hurricane Hazards, What Should I Do When a Watch or Warning is Issued)

AlertOkaloosa.com for daily conditions and to sign up for local weather alerts.

MyOkaloosa.com/emergency-management for local preparedness resources including the updated Hurricane Guide, EOC Activation Level, Evacuation Zones, Shelters, Disaster Supply Lists and Special Needs Registry Information.

Data on previous engagements demonstrates that we need to pay very close attention to how our environment responds to similar threats under similar circumstances. It is vital to know how much rainfall it takes to flood your street or property, how your property and avenues of ingress/egress behave under different storm surge levels, to know the limitations of your structure and damage caused by previous storms, and how long it takes for your family unit to mobilize if necessary.

Each storm has a different personality. On August 3, 1995, Hurricane Erin brought flooding rain which saturated the ground. Two months later, on October 4, Opal, a Category 4 storm, brought winds of 150mph which uprooted trees from the saturated ground causing severe damage to homes and other structures. Opal escalated from a Category 3 to a Category 4 storm while the community slept. People awoke in a panic and immediately began packing to attempt evacuation, which was impossible by that time. It is important to listen to our emergency management authorities when they instruct us to evacuate. Plan for the worst case scenario.

Crisis is no time for organization. Plan for the storm when things are calm. Changes to a family member's physical abilities may require different actions this year, or construction near your evacuation route may require a changed timeline. Rehearsing your plan with family members will reduce stress which will make these low frequency/high impact events a bit less frightening and result in greater efficiency and peace of mind. Remember to plan for your pets, notify a trusted person of where you intend to travel, and plan for extended medication needs.

Listen to directions from your local authorities and act early. Our county leadership is working hard to keep you safe and recognizes the value of the trust you place in us to do so. Together, we make a great team and can weather any storm.

It is an honor and a pleasure to serve as your Commissioner.