

AGENT | BROKERAGE

## To Florida, Love Texas: Agents offer hurricane advice

Irma could make landfall on the coast this weekend

BY GILL SOUTH ★  
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As Houston and coastal Texas deal with Harvey's aftermath, a nervous Florida prepares for the possibility that Hurricane Irma could make landfall this weekend.

Category 5 Irma, which has already pulverized the Caribbean, could present different challenges to the Sunshine State than Harvey did to Houston — less rain but potentially much higher winds that are currently being sustained at 180 mph. That makes power outages more likely and therefore social media communication, a key resource in many Houston rescue operations, potentially more challenging.

"A lot of people didn't have [power in Houston], but others were posting on their behalf; they kept open the line of communications on who needed to be rescued, who was out of medication and so on," said Cindy Hamann, president of the Houston Association of Realtors (HAR).

Hamann has been in touch with the Miami Association of Realtors and will be reaching out to the board of Realtors for the Florida Keys, where mandatory evacuations have been issued.

While many residents are evacuating on their own accord, Hamann points out that for those who stay, the Houston crisis highlighted the vulnerability of both the elderly and residents' furry friends. A good supply of pet food and helping your older neighbors stock up on essentials could prevent a bigger problem when the storm hits.

But according to some agents in the area, the store shelves in South Florida are already looking scarce. Miami agent Nick Quay had to evacuate from his island home, and is now sharing traffic updates with his Facebook followers and letting them know where



Cindy Hamann



## Be ready to help with temporary housing

Lance Loken, CEO of Keller Williams' Loken Group in Houston, has also spoken to colleagues in Florida this week, and his advice is to be ready to provide accommodations.

"I would get on the phone now to be requesting short-term leases," he said. "Right now we are getting 10s of dozens of calls from people on this, asking, 'can we rent for six months so that we can get our homes remodeled?'"

HAR has created a [temporary housing tool on its website](#). Consumers and agents are invited to post temporary housing for consumers for up to 90 days, which will help flood victims get back on their feet. The tool is universal and associations in Florida would be welcome to use it in their markets too, said HAR spokesman Matt Burrus.

The screenshot shows the HAR.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'FOR SALE', 'FOR RENT', 'HOME VALUES', 'SCHOOLS', 'NEIGHBORHOODS', 'AGENTS', 'TOOLS', 'SUPPORT', 'MY LIST', and 'LOGIN'. Below the navigation bar, there's a large banner for 'Harvey Temporary Housing'. The banner includes a search bar on the left, a map of Texas with a heart over the Gulf Coast, and a central text area that reads: 'If you have a home available on a temporary basis (for rent or for free) for someone displaced by Hurricane Harvey, please make sure to post it here. Pulling together in this time of need, we will all make sure that no one goes without a roof over their head and a warm bed in which to sleep.' Below this text is a green button that says 'Post Your Place →'. The HAR.com logo is in the top left corner.

Loken also recommends that Florida agents acknowledge what's happening with their clients and followers and prepare for weeks of disruption. "Focus on taking care of clients in the next week and make sure you are posting about relief efforts," he said. "We didn't start marketing again until yesterday, after a full week and half."

Cory Kammerdiener, whose company Newhomeprograms.com has agents in both Houston and Florida, advised that agents approach the next few days realistically.

"I am telling them to not think for one minute that this hurricane will not affect them," Kammerdiener said. "A lot of people in Houston did not think a hurricane three hours south of them would affect them. Boy were they wrong."

## Start by taking care of yourself

In Houston, the 911 emergency service was absolutely overwhelmed.



Dirk van Reenen

If the same happens in Florida, "you have to start by taking care of yourself, to rely on community when something like this happens," said Dirk van Reenen of Keller Williams Pearland.

"I would advise you to start small and go out bigger," he said. If you find safety, then move toward taking care of neighbors and connecting with local organizations supporting the community. Van Reenen said that agents should forget about brand loyalty and competition and immediately start setting up local networks with associations and churches. They will be the ones who are distributing supplies.

Real estate agents can be of assistance to these groups with their sphere of influence, van Reenen said. "They are very well connected, they really know the neighborhood, they are in a prime position to help organizers," he added.

If you can, leverage Facebook like you've never used it before, said Jesse Burton, VP of real estate at Phenom One Group.

Burton helped over 150 families in Houston to safety last week, and Facebook was the most effective social media tool in doing so.

"As I had information, I was sharing it on Facebook after making sure it was good, then copying it and putting it on my timeline," he said.

You also don't have to be in Florida or Houston to help out on Facebook; a virtual call center sprung up on the social media giant during the Houston flood, he said.

"Anybody who has access to social media and a phone, you can help out," he said.

## Getting back on your feet

If Florida agents are worried about how their income will be affected post-storm, HAR is currently spreading the word in Texas that, like all businesses and self-employed people, agents can file for temporary unemployment until they are back on their feet.



Jesse Burton



In addition, be prepared to share your community contacts like never before and distribute information on the rebuilding of your area, said Alissa Spears, [whose office was destroyed after Harvey hit her coastal town of Rockport last week](#).

“One day after the storm, create a list of contractors, roofers, plumbers, handymen, tree removalists, window people, carpet cleaners and people who can extract water,” she said. “Make it professional and ensure you have approval from those you put on the list to share their name.”

After the storm, get involved with the clean up effort. You don’t need special training — just start helping, Houston agents advised.

[Email Gill South.](#)

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**Eileen Gill** · Broker/Owner at The Gill Agency

And I would add--pick up your signs if you can--they become projectiles pretty easily in high wind. Not to mention, you will probably lose them and have to incur the cost to replace them. I live in Austin and we lost a good percentage of ours just in being in the outer bands of Harvey.

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**Dean Cacioppo** · Owner at Infinity Real Estate LLC

good article. well done. here is an update on Irma and the distruction from that one.

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**Julie Carpenter** · Bellingham, Washington

I urge brokers to become Community Emergency Response Team members, which provides training about personal safety and



info, and load the FEMA app to your phones ahead of time. Register for your area's emergency alert system. Be the source of the source for information and help. Have a plan and supplies ready in your home, office and vehicle. "Luck favors the prepared"

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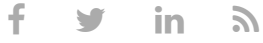
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