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As Hurricane Florence approaches, Realtors are bracing for impact

Agents along the North Carolina coastline are readying their properties and helping clients, including many vacation homeowners, prepare for landfall

BY ANDREA V. BRAMBILA

SEP 10

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As [Hurricane Florence gathers force in the Atlantic](#), Realtor Suzie Scholten of Midgett Realty is boarding up the windows of her home in North Carolina's Outer Banks and keeping a close eye on the news online.

The Category 4 storm, which is expected to make landfall on Thursday, [prompted a mandatory evacuation order for eight counties and an anticipated one million residents](#) as of Monday night. Up to nearly 760,000 homes in the Carolinas and Virginia could be affected, according to an [early analysis by property data firm CoreLogic](#).

Among the areas affected are Hatteras Island, where Scholten lives, which had an evacuation order beginning at noon on Monday, extending through the rest of Dare County at 7 a.m. Tuesday. But whether Scholten leaves will depend on the hurricane's trajectory.

"If it turns more in our direction, yes [I'll leave]," she told Inman in a phone interview. She and her family would head north where they have friends in Central Virginia.

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Suzie Scholten

out of harm's way.

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“Overprepare. Better to be too prepared than not enough. Just making sure you have food, supplies, water and a plan. Where to go, if you’re going to stay; what your plan is for your vehicles and for food and water,” she said.

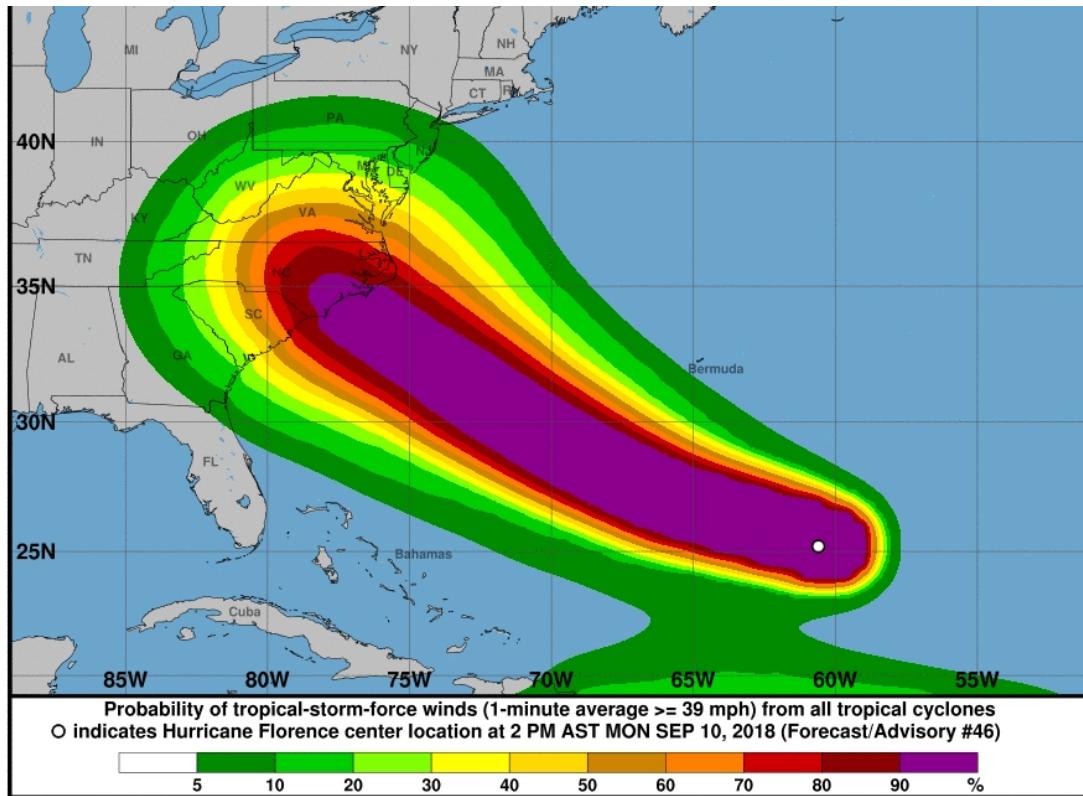
“We move [the vehicles] to higher ground. There are areas that are farther away from the ocean that if they were inundated with water would be historic so we can move our cars there. We’ll move them all and we’ll be able to walk to where they are.”

As the associate broker readies for what’s expected to be the region’s worst storm in decades, she fields questions from clients who have bought vacation homes through her on Hatteras Island. The homeowners don’t reside on the island, so they want to know if they should come to prepare the home or have a property management company handle it.

“If they live close enough they should come, but otherwise, they should have somebody else do it,” she said.

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Hurricane Florence windspeed projections and path. Credit: National Hurricane Center

'A chaotic dance'

Vacation rental and real estate firm Sun Realty in Kill Devil Hills is the area's largest [vacation rental property management company](#), according to Richard Hess, Sun Realty's vice president and general sales manager.

That means the firm has more than 1,000 vacation rentals in its charge.

"We have to get in touch with all the guests [to evacuate them while] at the same time preparing to go secure houses for property owners," most of whom live five or six hours away, he told Inman in a phone interview.

That process involves closing windows, putting up storm shutters for homes that have them, securing patio furniture, and shutting off the power and water for owners that request it. After the storm, Sun Realty will have a team go out and assess property damage.

"It's kind of a chaotic dance that we have to do for these storms. We've done it before," Hess said.



Richard Hess

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those who bought travel insurance, those policies will kick in, according to Hess.

“We don’t know what will happen by Saturday,” he said. Certain vacation rentals could be damaged or without water or power; even the undamaged may need cleaning up and the firm’s staff may or may not be available, he added.

“Some of our employees will evacuate and that’s fine. Some will and some won’t. We always tell our people if you don’t feel safe then leave. And quite frankly it’s not the place you want to be if the power is out for a week,” Hess said.

Sun Realty has a group texting function to communicate as a company, but the firm hasn’t used it yet.

“We’ll be open tomorrow. We’re anticipating it’ll be a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday event,” he said.

Hess himself has never evacuated during a storm and doesn’t plan to this time either.

“I’ll be in my house [on Colington Island] with my generator and riding it out. They can’t physically make you leave,” he said. “With the company we’ve got a lot of stuff going on. [And] I’ve got a big sailboat that it’s too late to take out of the water. Have to tend to that. It’s been through 17 years of storms. I’ve had 18 inches of water in my house before.”

“But I would not stay in the oceanfront if I were vacationing,” he added.

Hess is hunkering down and hoping for the best. “Our houses are built to really high standards to withstand storms. Our building codes are designed for heavy wind loads,” he said.

“We’ve been through this before and we’ll just do it again. We’re hoping in the current track, the storm stays south,” he added.

‘Preparing for the worst’

Willo Kelly, CEO of the Outer Banks Association of Realtors, is also watching for changes in the storm’s path, but not counting on that.



Willo Kelly

“We are preparing for the worst and hoping for the best, ensuring that staff, our members, leadership and its families are all safe,” she told Inman in a phone interview.

“There have been mandatory evacuations called in the past and lessons learned from past storms. There is a bit more concern about this particular hurricane because of its projected track and especially its intensity.”

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storm, according to Kelly.

“We’ve been planning prior to now,” she said. “We do have a crisis management plan. We reviewed that with staff this morning. We have a crisis management plan team. Post-storm we have an outline in place of what we need to be doing. So preparation is key,” she said.

OBAR’s files are backed up in the cloud in two different places, the building has storm shutters and a fireproof safe, and the power to the building will be turned off, she added.

The association has been letting its 1,100 or so members know about events that have been cancelled, including continuing education classes and a membership meeting, as well as information regarding lockboxes and signs.

“Considering the rain that we’re looking at having, possible storm surge activity and also wind, we’ve asked that members do the best they can to remove those lockboxes because we are anticipating damage to those lockboxes,” which would be very expensive to replace, she said.

Members have also been reminded that anything left outside is a potential projectile, so removing or securing signage is crucial, she said.

OBAR has been sharing communications from the [Dare County emergency management office](#). “They’ve been keeping everybody updated,” she said, adding that people can sign up for text notifications for storm updates.

Emergency officials have learned from past storms to stagger evacuations so not everyone is at the road at the same time, Kelly said, though there are still lines at gas stations.

“We’re hearing already that the grocery stores, the aisles for water and whatnot are certainly being picked through,” she said.

Her own home has a hurricane bunker, but if the storm’s track changes, she may head north to her mother’s home in Baltimore, though she wonders if there will be more flooding inland.

“It’s better to be safe than sorry,” she said.

Email Andrea V. Brambila.

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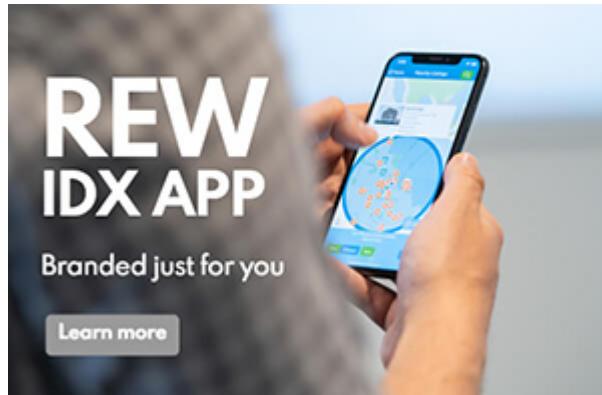
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I will be praying for everyone on the Carolina coast who will be impacted by this storm. My biggest concern is that they are predicting a storm surge as high as 20 feet. If that happens, many of the barrier islands will be completely underwater and the storm surge will damage properties several miles inland because eastern NC is very flat. Here in the Raleigh area, I anticipate that we could be without power for several days due a combination of heavy rain and winds, especially if Florence stalls as predicted.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2d · Edited**Paula Kosko**

One word of caution to those planning vacation trips that may be interrupted or cancelled. My family planned a trip to the Ft. Lauderdale oceanfront last September. When Irma hit, and our lodging had been without power for days, the owners battled mounds of sand and the tidal surge at the front door. We looked closely at our trip insurance and followed up with a phone call to be sure we were covered if we couldn't keep our itinerary. We would NOT have been covered because, even though the inn was not habitable, the flight we booked was not cancelled. Check the fine print of your trip insurance!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1d**Deborah Anne**

Still hoping and praying that Florence takes a U-turn east and away from land.

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all of us at L/M/VA Advance Realty in Miami are praying for you, your families and your communities. We are here to help. If the storm leaves you without power and resources.....call on us to help. Maybe we can help locate loved ones, friends and reach out to your clients if possible. We have been where you are. We know the hurt, fear and worry all too well. LET US HELP.

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