

Hurricane Dorian: Lessons Learned

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Well Rural Water, we did it! The first major hurricane of the season to threaten Florida and we all survived. It's important to take notes and share what we learned from these experiences. So today, FRWA is sharing some of the lessons we learned from Hurricane Dorian.

Be patient: As anyone who has worked with Florida's unique weather knows, things can change at any time. Thus in order to be ready for a weather event it is often necessary to wait and see what happens. With hurricanes we also have to wait for the storm to pass before deploying our assets. This can sometimes lead to people in need having to wait as the storm may have passed them, but not our staging area for equipment. Being patient can help us remain calm as we go through the trying times of an emergency response.

Each weather event is different: Based on our previous experience with category 3 storms, FRWA expected a certain amount of damage. In the case of Dorian, it turns out there were so few damages and the damages were so small that no one needed our help. This was a welcome surprise as we had our staff on standby ready to respond throughout the whole week. Since each event is different, we should be ready to respond or react, but also focus on the current event in particular.

Each system is important: As Hurricane Dorian moved along the state, FRWA worked with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to monitor the storm, send reports to the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and then assess damages following the storm. As we worked with DEP and the State EOC, there was a major concern for the large systems in the storm's path. However, everyone from DEP, the State EOC, and FRWA were also concerned with the welfare of our small systems. No matter how many people you serve, each system is a vital part of Florida.

If you need help, there are many ways to get it: Having worked with DEP on several weather events, our staff is aware of how valuable DEP's StormTracker is in reporting your system's status following the storm. When you update your status in StormTracker, you can request resources for your system such as generators, bypass pumps, and more. StormTracker is also the official way to report your system's status, including Boil Water Notices (BWN) and Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO), during a weather event. DEP will often use a call center to follow up with systems that have not updated on StormTracker; please make sure your contact information is up to date. FlaWARN is also a great group to be a member of as it allows your utility to get help from other utilities in the state. As we announced at our annual conference, DEP, FlaWARN, and FRWA are working on a new system to replace StormTracker which is expected to be ready for the 2020 Hurricane Season.

Florida was prepared: From the Governor's office down to our smallest members, FRWA found that every system in the State was prepared for Dorian. This was excellent news and certainly helped mitigate damage and service interruptions to your customers. Please continue being prepared.

Those are our lessons learned from Dorian and as time goes on we will continue to monitor weather events and be prepared to help our members recover. In the meantime though, continue preparing for future weather events. So here are a few reminders of what to do to be prepared.

- Check your generators: Do they have fuel, oil, coolant? Do they start? Have they been run under load in the past month?
- Clean up around your plant, lift stations, and wells: Strong winds can blow debris around often damaging controls. Equipment should be stored inside a secure location.
- Review your Emergency Response Plan (ERP): Do you have a chain of command? Is all the contact information up to date? Do all of your employees know their role(s)? Who will report to StormTracker and FlaWARN?
- Have your system information on hand: StormTracker requires your PWS ID or FLA ID, do you know it? What equipment and personnel do you need in an emergency? What equipment and personnel can you send to affected systems after the storm? If DEP calls, who should handle reporting your system status?
- Does your system have a connection with a neighboring system? If so, what is the protocol for using it? What agreements must be signed or drafted to use it?
- If you are not in the storm's path, can you help with the response? If so, who, what and, when will you be able to send to help?