

JULY 2020 Hurricane Briefing

To Go or Stay?

by Ben Morgan

As we enter July hurricane season has begun. Hopefully you have made your preparations in obtaining everything you need for a storm.

The question arises if you should go or stay if a storm threatens. Geographically Florida is badly placed by being a narrow finger of land that sits in the very southeast of the United States. It is exposed to hurricane strikes from 3 directions east, south and west. Statistically we get hit by more hurricanes and tropical storms than anywhere else in the world. They maintain their strength even after crossing the state and will regenerate and make a 180 degree turn and return to mainland Florida. Miami-Dade Count is the most frequently hit area. Crud, we live in a pretty bad place.

Let's look at some factors when you decide to go or stay.

Your health and age: Are you prepared for the rigors and discomfort of no power, utilities, high humidity, mosquitos and general discomfort of "camping in" as we call it for a couple of days or months? There will be few if any regular medical services and depending on the damage even emergency services can be non-existent.

The location of your home: Are you in a flood zone? If so, get out. Flood zone maps are available on the internet and at libraries. Does your community flood on a regular basis? If it does, your home may be high and dry but roads may be underwater for days. Remember, much of Dade county was built on swamp land and even after heavy thunder storms, local flooding is a regular issue. If you live in an evacuation zone, know its priority and if they tell you to leave, do it.

The construction/condition of your home: Do you have easy to use shutters. Is your roof in good condition? Does it sit high enough to avoid local flooding? Is there a shelter zone in the building?

Are you prepared: Do you have all the needed supplies and materials to sit out and survive for 10 to 14 days without power and normal services?

My recommendations are if you are in a good place, don't leave. If you decide to leave, do it early. Arrange with friends or family inland or out of state well before heading for shelter. If not, find hotels/motels on high ground with emergency

power and utilities. I have seen countless evacuations at the last minute turn into horror shows. Long lines of northbound traffic creeping along, broken down vehicles, panicking people, no gas or service facilities. You can drive north only to have a major storm follow you the entire length of the state or change directions and sweep across the state or loop back and hit the state from another direction. Do you have a reliable vehicle?

Shelter: The county establishes and maintains hurricane shelters in strong, public buildings out of flood zones and staffed and supplied with very basic services. Check for ones near you and what you need to bring.

My home is ready. It is of solid construction, approved, easy to close shutters, a good roof and it does not suffer from flooding or storm surge. Supplies in stock, generator checked, stuff tied down I know my neighbors and we talk and have plans. Even in a category 5 storm I will stay home. One friend has asked ahead of time for shelter and I will provide it. Can you say the same about yours?

Several years ago, friends decided to evacuate ahead of time from an approaching storm that was on an unsteady track. They left at the very last moment with several people, pets, and an assortment of items. It was an old unreliable vehicle. Just driving north, they said, no real plans. They called late afternoon in a panic about 100 miles north. The car broke down, it's raining and windy, AAA is backed up for hours, my cellphone is low on power. Can you come get us, they asked? You can guess my answer. Your lack of planning is not my emergency. In the end, they found shelter.

Next month, I will go over some things that have helped my family over 30+ years of hurricane seasons.

Remember my 3 P's of hurricanes, Planning, Preparation and Practice. Get them done now to avoid panic later.