



Partners in Prevention

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National Hurricane Center Director Richard Knabb, Ph.D.

While most Floridians collectively breathed a sigh of relief when Hurricane Matthew skirted its east coast in October, Rick Knabb, [National Hurricane Center](#) Director worried about others in its path.

Instead of feeding national and local television stations live broadcasts on where the hurricane was headed, Knabb made a plea as hurricane center staff stood behind him with heads slightly bowed. "Please," he said. "If your emergency managers tell you to evacuate, go." Knabb's goal was to use his air time to convey a more personal message.

"We made a decision to break from meteorology," he said. "People were not heeding calls from emergency managers to evacuate."

Knabb credits FLASH for the decision to try something different.

"One of the things that FLASH and others have taught us is you have to think of different ways to communicate to people and in ways that will change their attitudes and actions," he said. "There are so many media messages out there it gets harder and harder to break through and reach the target audience."

Knabb has spent much of his life in hurricane country. While he was born in Elmhurst, Illinois, his family moved to Florida when he was three years old. "In the late 1970's when Hurricane David threatened, I listened to Neil Frank, then director of the National Hurricane Center. I told my parents that I wanted to do his job someday."

Years, and several college degrees later, Knabb achieved his goal. In 2008, he was appointed to the post following the retirement of former Director Bill Read. Knabb said he has been aware of FLASH for years, but his first interaction with the organization was when Bill Read was director.

"When I became director, I decided during my tenure we would give higher priority to working with FLASH. We are likeminded," he said.

FLASH and the National Hurricane Center prioritize the message that people must prepare well in advance for hurricanes. They must make sure they have adequate insurance coverage, ensure that their homes are strong enough to withstand high winds, have adequate water, food and other supplies to exist for days without electricity. They must leave if emergency managers make that call.

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He said it is a big job to change peoples' attitudes and actions, but with FLASH and many other [Weather-Ready Nation](#) Ambassadors as partner organizations, change is occurring.

"I want to see fewer and fewer microphones shoved in the faces of survivors who say they've lost everything and can't recover," he said. "All of us becoming resilient won't happen in just one month or even one year, but I am certain it is going to happen."

"We've enjoyed an extraordinary partnership with the National Weather Service for nearly 19 years, and we've taken it to new heights under Director Knabb's leadership," said FLASH President and CEO Leslie Chapman-Henderson.