

EMS Safety Bulletin: Preparing for Hurricanes at Home and at Work

HURRICANE SEASON IN THE ATLANTIC BASIN IS JUNE 1- NOVEMBER 30

“By ensuring that their families are safe and protected, responders can turn their full attention to the life-saving mission of the rest of the community.” [Ready Responder](#)

Preparing Your Family:

Get/Make a Kit – Include non-perishable food (not requiring refrigeration, a manual can-opener, one gallon of water per person per day (enough for 3 days), battery-powered radio and flashlight (including extra batteries), first-aid kit including any special medications needed, hand tools like wrenches or pliers, blankets and pillows, and any special items like extra eyeglasses, pet food and supplies, games and toys for children, and any diapers or formula needs for infants.

Make a Plan – Where family members could meet and include out-of-town contacts for everyone to call to make sure they are all accounted for. Pin these numbers to the inside of your children's school backpack so they will have them if needed. Know what school plans are in an emergency so you will know how your children are protected if they are in school when the storm happens.

Stay informed – If a storm is coming be sure to listen to your weather radio and watch the news on TV or computer to keep up with what is happening in your area. Make sure you know what it means when officials are talking about Hurricane Watches, Hurricane Warnings or other alerts.

“Addressing protection needs is further complicated by the wide range of tasks that EMS responders undertake and the multiple types of agencies that provide emergency medical response service.” [Protecting Emergency Responders, Volume 2](#)

Know what you are dealing with – Hurricanes produce wind and flooding in addition to power outages and structure failure. Responders must prepare for and expect all of these events when responding and not exceed their capabilities. [If you and your team are not trained, call a team who is trained to do that task.](#)

Keep your vaccinations up-to-date –

- **Tetanus/Diphtheria (Td)** – Although boosters are recommended every 10 years, those working in disasters should consider receiving a booster every 5 years.
- **Hepatitis A and B** – Especially when working as a first responder with disaster survivors, in shelters and possibly coming in contact with bodies - These vaccines can be given separately or together and responders should check with their healthcare provider.
- **Other immunizations** – Responders should have current influenza vaccines and make sure that all childhood disease immunizations are current.

Keep your equipment in good shape and know its limitations – If your response vehicle is not 4-wheel don't try to make it go where only 4-wheel drive vehicles should go. Many agencies today incorporate a “just-in-time” supply line to save money, but sometimes during disasters there is no way to get extra supplies. Does your agency have enough for several days response during a hurricane event? Keep defibrillators, oxygen systems, and other nonexpendable equipment in good repair. What if equipment breaks during the initial response does your agency have extra parts and the expertise to repair the piece?

Practice good PPE – Responders need to understand the evolving work and safety environment surrounding emergency situations. Does your agency have enough PPE for all responders? Is it the right PPE (Masks, gloves, gowns/boots (if necessary), etc.) Is it up to date? Does everyone know how to use it? CDC recommends that during disasters agencies consider issuing fanny packs with individual PPE so that responders will have it readily available.

References:

- FEMA, Ready Responder, Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed., Emergency Planning for First Responders and Their Families; <https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/RRToolkit.pdf>
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- LaTourrette Tom, ... [et al.]; Protecting emergency responders : community views of safety and health risks and personal protection needs; Rand Science and Technology Policy Institute, 2003; http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2005/MR1646.pdf
- Rathbun, Katharine C., MD, MPH; Hurricane Katrina Materials: Immunizations for Disaster Management. The Law, Science and Public Health Law Site, 2005; <http://biotech.law.lsu.edu/cphl/Practice/disaster-immunizations.htm>

