

St. Johns County is vulnerable to hurricanes, the most dangerous and destructive storms on earth. The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office wants you to be prepared for any and all natural disasters. Don't wait till the last minute to make sure you and your family are ready.

We've put together information for you to help you understand what a hurricane is, how dangerous it can be, how you can be prepared, and where you can go for important information. Keep this with you and make sure to follow all instructions given to you by local authorities, continuously monitor all media resources, and follow SJSO on Facebook, Twitter, and Nextdoor for updates specific to St. Johns County.

Follow us online:

For a PDF copy of this page, [CLICK HERE](#).

For a copy of the Emergency Management Hurricane Preparedness Guide, [CLICK HERE](#).

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**What is a Tropical Cyclone?** A tropical cyclone is a rotating low pressure system that has organized thunderstorms but no fronts (a boundary separating two air masses of different densities).

Tropical cyclones with a maximum sustained surface winds of less than 39mph are called tropical depressions; those with a maximum sustained winds of 39mph or higher are called tropical storms; and when a storm's maximum sustained winds reach 74 mph, it is called a hurricane.

**What is a Tropical Storm?** A tropical storm is a tropical cyclone that has maximum sustained surface winds ranging from 39mph – 73mph (34-63 knots).

**What is a Tropical Storm Watch?** A tropical storm watch is an announcement that tropical storm conditions (sustained winds of 39-73 mph) are possible in the specified area within 48 hours. This is issued by the National Hurricane Center.

**What is a Tropical Storm Warning?** A tropical storm warning is an announcement that tropical storm conditions (sustained winds of 39-73 mph) are possible in the specified area within 36 hours. This is issued by the National Hurricane Center.

**What is a Hurricane?** A hurricane is a type of storm called a tropical cyclone which forms over tropical or subtropical waters with a maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or greater.

**What is a Hurricane Watch?** A hurricane watch is an announcement that sustained winds of 64 knots (74mph) or higher are possible within the specified area in association with a tropical, sub-tropical, or post-tropical cyclone. Because hurricane preparedness activities become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane watch is issued 48 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical storm force winds.

**What is a Hurricane Warning?** A hurricane warning is an announcement that sustained winds of 64 knots (74mph) or higher are possible within the specified area in association with a tropical, sub-tropical, or post-tropical cyclone. Because hurricane preparedness activities become difficult once winds reach tropical storm force, the hurricane watch is issued 36 hours in advance of the anticipated onset of tropical storm force winds. The warning can remain in effect when dangerously high water or a combination of dangerously high water and waves continue, even though winds may be less than hurricane force.

Hurricanes come in categories based on their wind strength. This is called the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. The categories are as follows:

- Category 1 – Sustained Winds: 74-95 mph / 64-82 kt / 119-153 km-hr  
Very dangerous winds will produce some damage: Well constructed frame homes could have damage to roof, shingles, vinyl siding and gutters. Snapped tree branches. Power outages likely.
- Category 2 – Sustained Winds: 96-110 mph / 83-95 kt / 154-177 km-hr  
Extremely dangerous winds will cause extensive damage: well constructed frame homes could sustain major roof and siding damage. Trees snapped or uprooted. Near total power loss expected.
- Category 3 – Sustained Winds: 111-129 mph / 96-112 kt / 178-208 km-hr  
Devastating damage will occur: Well built framed homes may incur major damage or removal of roof decking and gable ends. Damaged trees blocking roads. Utilities unavailable for days or weeks.
- Category 4 – Sustained Winds: 130-156 mph / 113-136 kt / 209-251 km-hr  
Catastrophic damage will occur: Well built framed homes can sustain severe damage with loss of roof and/or some exterior walls. Trees and power poles down. Most of area will be uninhabitable.
- Category 5 – Sustained Winds: 157 or > mph / 137 or > / 252 or > km-hr  
Catastrophic damage will occur: High percentage of framed homes destroyed. Fallen trees and power poles will isolate residential areas. Power outages will last weeks – months. Area uninhabitable.

**Being Prepared:** Being prepared for a hurricane and knowing what to do, what others will need to do, and what is expected of you and your family will lessen the fear of a hurricane threat. The KEY to safely surviving a hurricane is being prepared for what will occur before, during, and after the threat or actual hurricane hits. **Hurricanes do happen. Be prepared instead of surprised — plan ahead.**

**Know your zone.** Residents of St. Johns County are evacuated by zone – so it's important to know your zone. To find your evacuation zone, visit [www.sjcemergencymanagement.org](http://www.sjcemergencymanagement.org)

- Hurricane Evacuation Zones define the areas that need to evacuate. Each zone is vulnerable to different levels of storm surge
- Along the Atlantic coastline are evacuation zones A, B, C, D, and E.
- The coastal counties of NE Florida (Nassau, Duval, **St. Johns** and Flagler) have added an additional evacuation zone, Zone F
- Along the St. Johns River, Zone F represents a separate hazard comprised of low areas, or areas subject to flooding under specific conditions. Zone F in St. Johns County includes lower lying areas on the western edge of the county along the St. Johns River, including portions of Hastings, Flagler Estates, Picolata, and Wards Creek.

If you are in an evacuation zone that is required to evacuate, we strongly encourage you to find a friend or relative to stay with before choosing to go to one of the open shelters. **DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PET BEHIND.** Make arrangements now to stay with someone so that it isn't a last minute decision. Hotels will book up fast, are not pet friendly, and will not change their rules in the midst of a hurricane evacuation.

If you do need to go to a shelter, a pet friendly shelter and a special needs shelter will be announced.

**Build an emergency disaster kit.** In the event of an emergency, you will need access to food, water, and essential items for several days. Gather supplies, place in airtight bags and store in easy to access containers. Review your needs every year and update your kit as your family's needs change.

# Basic Disaster Supplies Kit

- Water - one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days
- At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food & a manual can opener
- Prescriptions / medications
- Clothing - including rain gear and sturdy shoes
- A well stocked first aid kit
- Personal hygiene items
- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Radio - battery operated or hand crank
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags & plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Activities - books, cards, games, toys
- Cash - banks and ATMs will not be available
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Extra charging cables
- Pet supplies - at least 3-5 days of food, water, and medications
- Drivers license / Picture ID / State ID
- Cash / Credit Cards / Debit Cards
- Important phone numbers and emergency contacts
- Medical records
- Prescription information including dosage and refills
- Doctors names and phone numbers
- Insurance documents (business, home, flood, car)
  - Policy numbers, policy types
  - household inventory; DVD, photo, video
- Banking/Creditor information and contact numbers
- Documents
  - Adoption, death, divorce, marriage certificates
  - copies of wills
  - home, property, vehicle titles
  - passports

**Before The Storm:** Should you find yourself in a storm situation, knowing how to prepare before the storm comes is key. Here are some tips on what to do in order to prepare your home, your boat, and your car before the storm hits.

- Install commercial shutters or prepare 5/8" plywood panels for your windows
- Stow and cover irreplaceable items
- Move outside items such as grills, patio furniture, and potted plants to safety so they don't become flying debris.
- Secure outdoor gates
- Reinforce garage doors
- When you evacuate, consider turning off electricity at the main circuit breaker – especially if your home is susceptible to flooding
- If your home has natural gas or propane, turn it off at the meter or tank
- Make a final walk-through inspection before leaving

It is recommended you have a mobile home installer who is licensed by the Manufactured Housing Section of the Division of Motorists Services conduct a safety inspection of your home's tie-down system and make any necessary corrections that will afford you maximum protection. Also:

- Check for loose straps
- Make sure your straps are properly aligned and not on an angle
- Check to be sure the recommended number of tie downs have been installed properly
- Verify that ground anchors and stabilizer plates have been installed properly
- Be sure support piers are in contact with the frame
- For additional protection, you may want to consider installing a longitudinal tie down system located at the front and rear of you home and add additional diagonal frame tie downs to the side of your home.

Whether you live on your boat or it is for recreation only – if a hurricane strikes, proper preparation is the best way to ensure you and your boat survive. Ideally, you already have a hurricane plan in place for your vessel, but there are a few basic hurricane tips all boaters can use:

- An important step in developing your plan is to review your dock contract for language that may require you to take certain steps or to leave the marina when a hurricane threatens. Ask the marina manager what hurricane plan the marina has in place. Be sure you know your responsibilities and liabilities as well as those of themarina.
- Keep all pertinent documents with you: insurance policies, photos or video of your vessel, boat registration, inventory list, lease agreement with the marina or storage area, etc.
- Secure your boat properly
- Plan to remove valuable equipment from your boat
- Remove all movable equipment
- Lash down everything you cannot move
- Seal all openings to make as watertight as possible.

Other tips:

- Secure or reinforce windows and doors
- Seal and secure the roof and make sure it is in good condition
- Trim branches and trees
- Store flammable materials in a secure place
- Secure solar panels, satellite dishes, and water systems with anchors
- Check and clean drain system
- In case of storms, move car to higher ground if in a flood zone
- Move any debris around the house
- Make sure drains on your street are clear of debris

**After The Storm:** For your safety, wait for the evacuation order has been lifted before you start heading home if you evacuated. This is for your safety and for the safety of the emergency responders. There are hazards they need to check before you can be on the roads like checking the county roads for fallen trees and power lines, inspecting bridges, completing search and rescue, finding where floods are and so much more. We understand you want to get to your home and see the damage, if there is any. We want to get you home as well. We just want to get you there SAFELY.

Points to remember post-storm:

- Avoid driving. Roads must be kept clear for emergency vehicles.
- Have valid identification with your current address with you as this might be required at security operations check points. This helps prevent looters.
- Use your telephone for emergency purposes only. Keep the lines open for emergency communications.
- Beware of snakes, insects, or other animals driven to higher grounds by flooding. Gators too.
- Enter your home with caution. Open windows and doors to ventilate and dry your home if necessary.
- If there has been flooding, have an electrician inspect your home or business before turning on the breaker.
- Be careful with fire. If your home or business uses gas, do not strike a match until you are sure there are no as leaks. Avoid candles. Use battery operated flashlight and lanterns instead.
- Avoid downed or dangling utility wires, especially when cutting or clearing fallen trees. Call professionals to remove large uprooted trees.
- Water precautions: whenever widespread flooding occurs, there is potential for bacterial contamination. Disinfect any tap water you use for cooking and cleaning. Bring water to a boil for five minutes or use chemicals (eight drops of chlorine bleach or iodine per gallon) or water purification tablets as directed. Continue to do so until official announcement of water safety.
- Take photographs of all damage before repairs begin, and keep all receipts for insurance purposes.
- Protect yourself from contractor fraud – only hire a licensed contractor. Be cautious of anyone coming to your home uninvited and offering to do repairs. Obtain a written estimate or contract for work to be completed. Do not pay in full before work begins or pay the final balance until work is completed until your satisfaction. Do not pull permits for the contractor as this may be an indication that they are not properly licenses. Visit [www.myfloridalicense.com](http://www.myfloridalicense.com) to check if a contractor is licensed. Report potential fraud to the State of Florida Consumer Fraud hot-line at 866-966-7226
- Be patient. It will take time for things to return to normal.

If you have any questions, head over to the Emergency Management website at [www.sjcemergencymanagement.org](http://www.sjcemergencymanagement.org)

Make sure you follow us on our social media platforms to stay up to date on what's going on in our county:

[www.facebook.com/stjohnsheriffoffice](http://www.facebook.com/stjohnsheriffoffice)

[www.twitter.com/sisopio](http://www.twitter.com/sisopio)

[www.instagram.com/sisopio](http://www.instagram.com/sisopio)

[www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com)