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10 Things

To Do When Dealing With a Hurricane

1. Take forecasts seriously. “After hurricanes Katrina and Rita ‘missed’ Houston in 2005, some residents thought we’d dodge Hurricane Ike. On Wednesday [Sept. 10], two nights before Ike struck Houston, many of our residents chose to ‘ride it out.’ But once they saw TV footage that night of Galveston, they changed their mind and left our 490-unit community. The evacuation notice was posted at 7 a.m. Sept. 11 to leave by noon and most were going before the storm hit Sept. 12.”

2. Give residents an emergency preparation plan. “We had distributed pamphlets that explained what precautions they should take. Our most crucial request was that they clean out their refrigerators. Without power, an abundance of food spoils and must be disposed. This proved to be the most labor-intensive chore our staff performed during recovery. Also ask residents to clear their patios of furniture or other potential projectiles.”

3. Secure your community. “Keep trees trimmed. Lower the levels of swimming pools and turn the pumps off. Open all electronic access gates. Stow pool furniture, umbrellas and anything that might become a projectile in a heavy wind (Ike’s winds in Houston were sustained at 110 mph, one mph shy of a Category 3 hurricane). Order extra roll-off community trash bins—you’ll need them!”

4. Own a generator and gas-powered chain saw. “Our housekeeper bought a generator when the storm was a threat, but she never lost power at her home, so she sold it to us [for about \$700]. We first were told by the City of Houston that we’d be without power until Sept. 21, but to its credit, we had partial power on Sept. 18 and full power shortly thereafter. The chainsaw helps to remove fallen trees, though fortunately, trees caused little damage to our well-built 1968 community.”

5. Be ready at the start of hurricane season. “Come August, check all emergency equipment to make sure it is in good working condition. Have extra gas on hand for power tools and generator.”

6. Stockpile life’s necessities. “Personal keepsakes aside, have residents fill their bathtubs with water. You can never have enough food, drinking water, batteries and battery-powered devices.”

7. Make sure you have your residents’ emergency contact information. “You need to alert residents on the condition of the community. But don’t worry, they’ll call you. We have four phone lines, and after they were restored, none stopped ringing with calls from our residents—some called four times a day. For many, when in crisis mode, they just want to talk. It makes them feel better.”

8. Keep your residents informed. “The community maintenance director stayed through the storm. He knocked on every door to determine which residents remained. After the storm passed and phones were re-connected, we regularly updated our answering machine with details. And, working with Property Solutions, we posted information updates on our Web site about when it was safe to return.”

9. Make the most of the opportunity. “With no power, no television or any typical entertainment choices, I was pleasantly surprised to see parents having greater, closer interaction with their children, spouses and friends.”

10. Stress teamwork and open your heart. “Get ready to get to know your neighbors much better in times of crisis. You can try to empathize with the catastrophe victims you see on television, but you don’t really know what it’s like until you live through one.” ■■■



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