

Get Ready for Another Hurricane Season

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The Rio Grande Valley has been very lucky in recent years. The last hurricane to hit the Valley was back in 2008 when Hurricane Dolly struck the area. That storm caused total property damage estimated at \$1.05 billion, according to the National Hurricane Center. What that should tell you is that you never know when a hurricane might strike, and when it does, the effects can be devastating.

With that in mind, hurricane season is creeping upon us once again. There's no need to panic, but you should be prepared in the event that a storm takes aim on our Valley home. The first thing that you should do, whether you own a home or business, is have a plan and be ready to put that plan into motion should the need arise.

To help formulate that plan, perform an assessment of your home or business to identify any vulnerabilities at your facility and critical systems. Figure out when and to where to evacuate and locate a good place to seek shelter within your home or business if you are unable to evacuate.

Communication is critical during a hurricane. You don't want to be left scrambling for names and numbers when a storm hits. Make sure you have contact information for important people in your life (employees, family, close friends) as well as emergency contacts for those people. Double-check that the information is accurate. Get more information than you think you need. If possible, get more than one method to contact those people, like home phone, mobile phone and email addresses. You might have more luck with an alternative contact method. Don't forget to also have contact numbers for local and state law enforcement; medical and fire services; your insurance carriers; and the National Weather Service. Don't lose seconds having to search for these numbers because you may not have seconds to waste.

As part of your plan, make sure everyone in your family or at your business knows first aid and CPR techniques. Also, assign people specific roles in the event of a disaster or emergency. This will ensure that you can take action rather than panic in the face of a storm, and it will make everyone feel as if they are a part of the team.

If you own a business, make sure that you set up things before the hurricane strikes. Make sure you have important numbers of clients and businesses, and let them know about your hurricane plans.

Don't forget to ensure your building is ready for a storm. Clean any drainage systems and gutters. Board up or shutter windows to prevent further damage if it's a bad storm. Don't forget to back up data on your computers. You never know if you might lose power or that equipment could get damaged.

During a storm, be aware of any leaks or damage caused by the storm. If there is a power outage, turn

switches off until the power returns. When power is first restored, that quick surge of electricity could damage sensitive equipment, like computers and air conditioners.

While we certainly hope that there will be no storms that hit the Rio Grande Valley, it's important to plan ahead. Your safety and those around you could depend on it.