

IT'S HURRICANE SEASON – BE PREPARED!

By Eleanor Cicerchi

A hurricane (wind speeds of 74 mph or higher) has not come ashore in the Tampa Bay area for nearly 100 years, but new, unpredictable weather patterns could change that this year. The warmer-than-average water Pacific Ocean phenomenon known as El Nino could also be a factor. Hurricane season is June 1 through November 30. El Nino usually clamps down on the formation of hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, where most hurricanes that strike Florida begin, but not necessarily. Strong winds and flooding spawned by off-shore hurricanes struck our area last year despite El Nino: Hermine and Matthew, both in September. And of course heavier-than-usual rains can cause destructive flooding at any time.

The key to avoiding hurricane damage or harm to your family, your pets and your property is BEING PREPARED. Here are a few helpful tips.

NEW: A Change in Quail Forest's Evacuation Level

All of Quail Forest is an Evacuation Level B area, which means that evacuation is mandatory when potential storm tide heights are higher than 8 feet but less than 14 feet. Yes, we used to be in a Level C area (storm tide heights of up to 19 feet), but that has been changed, says the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Those of us who have lived here two years or more have seen how quickly some areas in East Lake Woodlands have temporarily flooded and understand the wisdom of the change.

Gather Essential Items

Many disaster guides recommend that you have a “go” bag in a front closet or near the door. This should include a flashlight and batteries, drinking water, medications, power bars or nuts, a rain poncho and small pillow. If you have pets, pack what they will need, too (see more below).

If evacuation seems likely, here is a handy checklist for items to gather and put in your car:

- Flashlight and batteries or battery-operated lantern
- Medications for 7 days in zip-lock bags (the plastic 7-day containers are handy and don't take up much room)
- Sleeping bag or blanket(s) and pillow(s)
- Shelf-stable food such as power bars, camping or military packets, or canned goods and a non-electric can opener
- Portable fresh water container that will last 2-3 days, water purification tablets, portable camp stove, water-proof matches or a lighter, and a cooler or ice chest

- Rain poncho
- Insect repellent
- Portable battery-operated fan
- Solar-panel charger for your phone or tablet or a small battery-powered radio
- Extra clothes
- Books, small games

Also, remember to keep with you your government-issued photo ID, passport, immigration documents (if relevant) and a copy of your insurance policy with the agent's name and contact information. It's a good idea, too, to scan these documents into a cloud-based service such as Google Drive, iCloud or Dropbox in advance so that they are available to you off-site.

If you have pets, see below for advice on being ready to evacuate them.

Make an Emergency Plan

Often you need go no further than 8 to 10 miles inland or to higher ground to be out of harm's way. Quail Forest's evacuation route is north and east, away from the coast and Tampa Bay. Identify family or friends with whom you can stay for a few days or, if a storm is imminent, make a hotel reservation in advance if you are not planning to go to a shelter.

Evacuation Route

Our evacuation route is north on McMullin Booth Road (#611) and east on Keystone Road or Trinity Road or north on Route 19 and east to Keystone Road. Most people will head northeast on I-75 north toward Ocala. How far you go will depend on the advance plans you have made or the advice you receive on your phone, TV, computer or radio. You may also seek shelter in a designated North Pinellas Evacuation Shelter.

Where are the closest evacuation shelters?

The closest evacuation shelters are East Lake High School, 1300 Silver Eager Drive in Tarpon Springs, west off McMullin Booth Road, and Brooker Creek Elementary School at 3130 Forelock Road, Tarpon Springs, east off McMullin Booth Road. Both are well marked. There you will find food, water, cots, rest rooms, and volunteers to make you comfortable.

In an evacuation shelter, expect no privacy and a space no larger than 6" x 5' for you and your belongings. Therefore, don't bring bulky items. Also, don't bring expensive jewelry or other valuables, because the shelter may not have police officers on-site.

Quail Forest board member Mike DiFabbio, who has helped organize and man pet-friendly evacuation centers and was active in rescuing pets after Hurricane Katrina, reminds us, “Evacuation shelters are not a Resort; they are Last Resort.” Please plan accordingly.

What if I have pets with me?

Pets (generally dogs and cats only) are welcome at Dunedin Highland Middle School, 70 Patricia Avenue, Dunedin, or Oak Grove Middle School at 1370 South Belcher Road, Clearwater, on a first-come, first-served basis. Remember to take a pet ID and photo (ideally, your pet will be micro-chipped, too), your contact information and updated records for proof of shots or county license, which most pet-friendly shelters require. Also take a pet carrier, a 7-day supply of pet food and medications, dishes for food and water, a leash, and a non-electric can opener or litter box, if appropriate. Comfort items such as a blanket or toy can help your pet get through the disruption.

Options other than shelters include arranging to go to a family member or friend’s home on higher ground or a pet-friendly hotel or motel.

If you have other animals, such as birds or even horses, the Humane Society of Tampa Bay has checklists to help assure than you don’t overlook any important item.

See www.humanesocietytampa.org.

What if I or someone in my group uses a wheelchair or is mobility impaired?

All shelter entrances are handicapped accessible. The two nearest shelters with ADA-accessible restrooms are Dunedin Highland Middle School, 70 Patricia Avenue, Dunedin, or Oak Grove Middle School at 1370 South Belcher Road, Clearwater.

How do I know if a hurricane is headed our way and how strong it is?

Those of us with smart phones will likely receive push texts notifying us of a *hurricane warning* (hurricane conditions, or sustained winds of 74 mph or more, are expected in our area within the next 36 hours) or *hurricane watch* (hurricane conditions are possible in our area within 48 hours). Local television stations run these warnings at the bottom of the screen as a hurricane-strength storm approaches and often have round-the-clock coverage of the storm instead of network feeds. You can also follow a storm’s progress on The Weather Channel or go to one of the popular smart phone weather apps such as WeatherBug, apps for local television stations and the Tampa Bay Times mobile app. Additionally, you can use your PC or laptop to register for breaking news and text alerts at www.tampabay.com or www.tbo.com. Every media outlet in our area is likely to be tuned to the storm’s progress, so check frequently. You’ll also find up-to-date reports on major national media.

How will my home or business be protected if I need to leave?

The local police are responsible for protecting abandoned homes and businesses from evacuation until the Governor calls in the National Guard. The most vulnerable time is during the high point of the storm before the National Guard arrives. Nevertheless, we have all heard stories about the risks of staying in your home despite an evacuation order. The most important priority is keeping people and pets safe and out of harm's way.

Here's wishing for a hurricane-free summer and fall for Quail Forest and all of Tampa Bay!

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Evacuations

There are two types of evacuations:

- **Recommended Evacuations** are issued to a zone or zones when there's a potential for storm surge in the zone
- **Mandatory Evacuation** are issued when there's a probability of storm surge is high, and loss of life could occur if residents don't leave. NOTE: It is illegal to stay in a home under a mandatory evacuation order.

Evacuation Zones tell you when to evacuate (Quail Forest is Zone B)

Are areas that will potentially be inundated with storm surge so that those residents can have the opportunity to evacuate safely ahead of a hurricane. Zone A is closest to large bodies of water that has storm surges, and will be evacuated first)

Zone	Storm Surge Category	Storm Surge in Feet
A	1	7-12
B	2	12-15
C	3	15-20
D	4	20-25
E	5	25+

Quail Forest is in ZONE B due to our close proximity of Lake Tarpon which is connected to the Bay.

Plan ahead for evacuations

Your best plan (depending upon the hurricane size and estimated storm surge) is to stay in the Tampa Bay area or in other Florida cities with friends, relatives, hotels, or hosting families inland or at higher ground. Pinellas County has designated evacuation shelters, but remember, an evacuation shelter is not a resort.... it's your last resort. If you have special needs or have pets, you will need to verify they are welcomed (there are designated pet friendly hotels, hosting families and evacuation shelters. Not all shelters allow pets). Please visit the following website to help prepare for a storm.

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/prepareahead.htm>

Evacuation Options

- Friends or family in areas not normally evacuated during storms
- Hotels/Motels/RV Parks
(see http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/hotel_motel.htm for information)
- Host Homes
(see <http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/hosthomes.htm> for information)
- Pinellas County Evacuation shelters (your LAST resort)

Special Needs residents MUST plan ahead.

If you plan to evacuate to a Pinellas County evacuation shelter, you must pre-register IN ADVANCE at the following website. The website also provides information on “Special Needs Disaster Supply Kits” and what to bring when you evacuate.

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/specialneeds.htm>

The closest Special Needs evacuation shelters are:

- **Dunedin Middle School** - 70 Patricia Ave., Dunedin
- **Oak Grove Middle School** - 1370 S. Belcher Rd., Clearwater

Pet Friendly evacuation shelters

If you plan to evacuate to a Pinellas County evacuation shelter, you must pre-register IN ADVANCE at the following website. The website also provides information on “Pet Disaster Supply Kits” and what to bring when you evacuate.

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/petpreparedness.htm>

The closest Pet Friendly evacuation shelters are:

- **Dunedin Middle School** - 70 Patricia Ave., Dunedin
- **Oak Grove Middle School** - 1370 S. Belcher Rd., Clearwater

Evacuation Shelters

Evacuation shelters are the last resort when you evacuate. There may or may not be security and each person is allotted the size of a cot for themselves and their belongings.

Check to see if your shelter is open

at <http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/shelters.htm>.

Please visit http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/PDF/Checklist_Evacuation.pdf for information on what to bring

- Carwise Middle School
- 3301 Bentley Dr, Palm Harbor
- Palm Harbor Middle School
- 1800 Tampa Rd, Palm Harbor
- East Lake High School
- 1300 Silver Eagle Dr, Tarpon Springs
- Palm Harbor University High School
- 1900 Omaha St, Palm Harbor

After the Storm

After the storm, it's time to assess the damage. Keep your battery-operated radio close for news reports about damage, road closures, power outages and other emergency instructions. With three to seven days of uncertainty depending on the storm, you'll need to rely upon what you've stored for food, water, medications and entertainment. If the county is hit with a hurricane, it could be weeks or months before life gets back to normal. Please visit <http://www.pinellascounty.org/emergency/afterthestorm.htm> for important information.