

Practical Tips for Hurricane Prep

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There is no one way to prepare for a hurricane, but there are some basic ideas that should be part of everyone's plans.

Phone Tree:

Make sure every work site has a phone tree. Designate a date and time to run through the calls once. Remember, cell phone towers may be down, so make sure that everyone also provides a Land-line/Hard-line number if possible.

Pre Set Leadership Team Contact

Make arrangements to stay in contact with central office leaders in case the school district offices are shut down. Schedule a daily teleconference conference call (or two) every day at a set time. This call should provide leadership with a damage and recovery report and address any other concerns. Phone tree calls should follow this call. (This should also tie into the schedule of media briefings.)

Identify Two Hotline Numbers.

1. One should be distributed to the media. It is for parents and students to call AFTER the storm has passed. This number will provide recorded information about which schools are being used as shelters, when the school system expected to return to full operation and any appropriate information about bus transportation, special needs issues, etc.
2. The second number is for EMPLOYEES ONLY. This number should provide information about work schedules, damage estimates and should involve "live" operators, usually members of the PR or HR staff not dealing with the media. In our community, employees often leave the area when a storm approaches, so this helps employees that are hundreds of miles away find out when to report back to work. (Hurricane Wilma hit us during our open enrollment period. We were not fully web based at that time. The employees and retirees were worried that their benefits would cease if they could not choose or confirm their insurance and other benefits. Having actual people answer those calls helped calm nerves.)

Direct Deposit

It may be too late for this hurricane season, but consider creating some incentives for your employees to migrate to a system of direct deposit for their paychecks. Although we had been moving in that direction for years, Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, hitting back to back in the same year, convinced the rest of our employees that this would be a great benefit. (Direct deposit employees automatically got paid,

even if they were out of town or stuck at home while the manual paycheck employees had to wait or drive through hazards to pick up their checks).

Backing Up Your Public Face

Develop relationships with sister Districts that can host your “dark” web site or back up web site. If the power goes down in your community, there should be a way to bring up a back up site, rerouting your URL to an alternate serve that can also provide updates on the district’s recovery. How are you backing up your servers and main frames?

Equipment

Be ready to share or lend or borrow Equipment from another district. Develop the plan for that now. No matter what you have, you’ll run short of something if there’s damage. Florida has laws that allow all kinds of asset sharing for this type of circumstance. Create a charging station for equipment in your Emergency Op Center. Make sure you have cameras or smart phones ready to go. Start posting information to your web site, or alternate web site as soon as possible.

Forget the Duct Tape, But Remember to Smile

Plastic Bags and Duct tape might be good for making a rain poncho, but they aren’t going to protect much of anything exposed to heavy wind and rain. The thing that will carry you through a lot of the crisis is your sense of humor and the perspective that as long as you are OK, everything else can be replaced. Be ready to encounter frayed nerves, dumb questions, fear driven actions and anything else that you can think of. Hurricanes seem to bring out the worst and the best in us. And be prepared to showcase the true heroes and sheroes. Make sure that you are in a position to share the good news. There will be lots of little successes.

We have also encouraged those employees without family responsibilities to get trained to help other agencies distribute materials, take care of health care workers children, or whatever the community needs.