



Facility Safety

Is Your Facility Ready for Hurricane Season?

Holly B. Martin | Sep 06, 2018

How ready is your organization for hurricane and tropical storm season? Learn how to best be prepared with emergency action plans—for evacuations and shelter as needed. We talk to the National Safety Council for advice.

According to the National Hurricane Center, the Atlantic hurricane season officially runs from June 1 through Nov. 30 each year, while the eastern Pacific season runs from May 15 through Nov. 30. If your facility is located in an area that could be affected by a hurricane—or a tropical storm or storm surge—it's important to include these in your emergency action planning.

Potential hazards from hurricanes include powerful winds, heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides—so emergency action planning as prescribed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that accounts for hurricane season is an important part of safety programs.

What Is an Emergency Action Plan?

“OSHA’s *emergency action plan (EAP)* regulation (29 CFR 1910.38) requires reporting and evacuation procedures for all perceived emergency situations,” says Brandon Hody, a safety and occupational health professional at Concurrent Technologies Corp. (CTC). “Any emergency preparedness specifically regarding hurricanes should be incorporated into your organization’s written EAP.”

In addition to the emergency action plan, OSHA provides *guidance* to employers on preparing for and responding to hurricanes, but this is not to be confused with specific legal requirements, according to Hody.

Among other things, an EAP must include:

- Procedures for emergency evacuation, including type of evacuation and exit route assignments
- Procedures to be followed by employees who remain to operate critical plant operations before they evacuate
- Procedures to account for all employees after evacuation
- Procedures to be followed by employees performing rescue or medical duties
- An employee alarm system with a distinctive signal for each purpose
- Training of employees to assist in a safe and orderly evacuation

- Review of the emergency action plan with each employee covered by the plan

Why Hurricane Preparedness Means Preparing for the Worst

The *National Safety Council* provides programs to help employers plan for emergencies and train their employees in emergency procedures, including evacuation or sheltering in place during hurricanes.

“The employer should know the evacuation routes for the county and state, which are going to be freed and cleared before other routes,” says John Vasquez, a safety consultant at NSC. “Stay in communication with emergency authorities to keep on top of any backup of traffic or debris on the road that could block it.”

Vasquez says that employers should also be aware of emergency evacuation assistance programs in their county and should be familiar with the location of emergency shelters nearby in case their building has been flooded and their employees need to go somewhere safe.

Downed trees or flooded roads may prevent the arrival of local emergency assistance, such as police, fire and ambulance, he says, so it’s a good idea to have one or more employees trained in first aid/CPR, in the event that people are injured due to broken windows and flying debris.

There’s more to know about planning beyond emergencies, including business continuity. Learn all about it in “Will Your Manufacturing Facility Be Ready if a Disaster Strikes?”

Tropical Storm and Hurricane Preparedness Tips

“In a manufacturing facility, such as a metal shop, you need managers who can initiate a shutdown ahead of time before the storm actually hits so there won’t be any damage to the equipment, because you can’t just hit an off switch,” Vasquez says.

“All managers at the plant should know where the utility shut-offs are for the electrical, water and gas supplies in the event of an emergency, and there has to be a method for shutting everything down in a safe manner and still having time to get people to a sheltered area,” he says.

In your plan, be sure to include a system for backing up critical information on a server, including customer orders, billing information, payroll and everything else needed for the business, explains Vasquez.

“Rather than having employees stay at work during that time, they may want a plan that allows employees to work from home, so that they don’t have to be responsible for as many people at the workplace that normally would be there on a business day, ” he says.

Hurricane Aftermath: Business Recovery

"Any company should have a plan for business continuity in the event of a hurricane," says the National Safety Council's John Vasquez. "This means they should designate a specific alternate business location, and possibly set up an agreement with a hotel or some other facility where they can set up temporary phone lines, an IT center and offices."

If there is any damage to the business property, companies should hire an engineer to inspect and ensure that it's safe for employees to return to work. Flooding may affect the structural integrity of the foundation, and the walls may not be as strong as they should be, explains Vasquez.

"The inspection should cover the entire property from perimeter fence to perimeter fence, including the parking lot, power supply, and pumps for any standing water," says Vasquez.

"All managers at the plant should know where the utility shut-offs are for the electrical, water and gas supplies in the event of an emergency, and there has to be a method for shutting everything down in a safe manner and still having time to get people to a sheltered area."

John Vasquez

Safety Consultant, National Safety Council

What Is Shelter in Place?

During the storm itself, it's important to have **first-aid kits**, food and water for employees who may end up sheltering in place, as well as a supply of gasoline if **generators** are being used.

"Employers should designate a safe location for employees to go, such as a hallway, restrooms or interior rooms without windows, where they will be protected from the storm," Vasquez says.

"If there's flooding on the property, the company should encourage employees to stay away from standing water that's near downed electrical lines or transformers on the ground," he says.

"In the case of heavy damage to the building, people may panic and behave irrationally, so it's important for employers to prepare employees ahead of time with shelter-in-place drills, as well as emergency exit drills," he says.

"There's a lot for employers to consider when planning for hurricanes, including flooding and associated electrical issues, and having people trained in first aid/CPR," Vasquez says. "Probably the biggest area of concern is having people understand the seriousness of the situation."

How is your company preparing for hurricane season? Share your experiences.